





7. THE STORY OF H.M.S.  
"VICTORY"

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H.M.S. "VICTORY"

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# THE STORY OF H.M.S. "VICTORY"

*by*

GEOFFREY CALLENDER

M.A., F.S.A., A.I.N.A.

*Professor of History, Royal Naval College, Greenwich  
Hon. Secretary of the Society for Nautical Research*



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## FOREWORD

THIS book was written fifteen years ago to call attention to the *Victory's* age, to the infirmities which age had brought in its train, and to the treatment which those infirmities seemed to demand.

It was well known to everybody fifteen years ago that the *Victory* was Nelson's flagship at the battle of Trafalgar. But it was not equally well known that the *Victory* was over forty years of age when she set sail for that immortal battlefield, and that when her fighting days were ended by the peace which followed Waterloo, fifty-six long years had sped since the laying of her keel. The determination of our ancestors after Waterloo to preserve her as a perpetual monument to Nelson's memory may have been somewhat reluctantly undertaken; but if this were so, every succeeding year deepened the approval of those that came after. Every succeeding year heightened the *Victory's* value, not only as a visible link with the past, but as a visible reminder of Service and Sacrifice and an incentive to fresh endeavour.

But every succeeding year took toll of the famous ship, and every completed lustrum challenged the wisdom of those who, after Waterloo, had decided to leave the *Victory* afloat. This decision was natural enough when made; for, outwardly at least, there was little enough to distinguish Nelson's flagship from her sisters. Within a few years of Waterloo the "wooden walls of old England" changed their outward appearance and garbed themselves in black and white. The *Victory*, which had hitherto set the fashion in such matters, made haste to follow the

prevailing mode. Another thirty years went by, and the wooden walls which bade the *Victory* adieu on their way to the Crimean War carried a tall smoke-stack amidst their snowy sails, testifying to the presence, as an auxiliary, of a novel motive-power. Even so, their appearance was not greatly changed, and if the *Victory* failed to move with the times, it was only her sedentary disposition that stopped her. Still, in her disinclination to follow suit she was confessing herself old-fashioned. And then, at last, a century from the day of her own launch, the first "Ironclad" saluted her; and before the *Victory* had well recovered from the shock, more up-to-date Ironclads discarded masts and sails and put their whole trust in machinery. The day, in short, had come when the popular papers portrayed the latest additions to the Royal Navy alongside of Nelson's flagship, not because the glaring incongruity of the two promised a good picture, but to illustrate in the most convincing and forcible way that elusive process—the passage of Time.

After spending one hundred years in Portsmouth harbour, the *Victory* in two senses had "suffered a sea-change." Tended lovingly by the officers and men of the Royal Navy, who gloried in the fact that their charge was still on the active list, the *Victory* had in ways too numerous to mention been transmogrified. In her masts, her rigging, the arrangement of her decks, the position of her cabins and bulkheads; in her bow, her stern; in the manner of firing her guns and painting her sides, there was little enough for Nelson to recognize, had he come aboard again to investigate. Distressing as these changes were to all who had eyes to see, they were, however, of small account compared with the decay of the vessel's underwater fabric and the distortion of her form. After tugging at her moorings with



every tide for a hundred years, the *Victory* could endure such usage no longer. However well-preserved her towering sides might be, their good looks were deceptive. Of this unique example of naval architecture the foundations had in a literal sense perished. Unless help were forthcoming the days of the *Victory* were numbered, and in any case the most famous ship in the world could no longer with safety remain afloat.

It was to remind the Public what the *Victory* stood for and to urge them to preserve for posterity the veritable shrine of naval achievement that this book was first conceived. Undertaken in 1913, it was completed the following year, and made its first appearance in print almost in the very hour that the Germans invaded Belgium and the Great War began. When the Great War ended and signatures were affixed to the Treaty of Versailles, the peril of the ship had been intensified by five more years of inevitable neglect. Happily the underwater timbers still held together; and while there was life there was hope. But an official diagnosis confirmed the gloomiest forebodings.

In 1920 a second impression of the book was printed, and served in some degree to fulfil the purpose for which the first had been designed. In the Epilogue, reprinted in its original shape, the suggestion was repeated that H.M.S. *Victory* should be preserved for ever in a dry-dock, and that her structural rehabilitation should be officially entrusted to the Society for Nautical Research.

Lord Milford Haven, better known as "Prince Louis," had been President of the Society since its inception; and at the next general meeting, on June 15, 1921, inaugurated the Society's crusade for the preservation of the ship. Negotiations with the Admiralty followed; and on January 12, 1922,

H.M.S. *Victory* was reverently moved into No. 2 Dock at Portsmouth. Her transference from the fairway was attended with considerable risk and was accomplished only with great difficulty. Though from one-third to one-half of her fabric had perished, the operation of docking was safely executed; and the occasion was marked by an Admiralty announcement that her new berth—the oldest surviving dry-dock in the world—should be reserved for her exclusive use in perpetuity.

The sudden death of Lord Milford Haven, just before the *Victory* made her last sea journey, delayed progress for a time; but in the spring of 1922 the Society for Nautical Research had the great good fortune to persuade Admiral of the Fleet Sir Doveton Sturdee to take Prince Louis's place. The first general meeting of the Society for Nautical Research at which he presided (June 14, 1922) was a memorable day. Sir Doveton Sturdee announced that the Board of Admiralty was willing to accept the Executive officers of the Society as official advisers in the work of restoring Nelson's flagship; and although historic tradition forbade the grant of money out of naval votes for the repair of a ship which could no longer fight, their Lordships were willing that the Society for Nautical Research should organize an appeal to the British peoples throughout the world for the funds that were necessary to restore H.M.S. *Victory* to her condition as in the time of Nelson.

The actual campaign to raise the funds was opened on Trafalgar Day, 1922, after several months had been spent in busy preparation. The hour, chosen with deliberate care, proved singularly inauspicious; for on October 21st the country was in the throes of a General Election, and invitations to contribute to the *Victory* fund were lost in a cataract of political placards.



Money at first, therefore, came in very slowly, and it was found necessary to institute a guarantee fund to provide financial sinews to continue the fight. This fund, which ran to several thousands of pounds, was undertaken by individual members of the Society for Nautical Research. Meanwhile Sir Doveton Sturdee, who was at the *Victory* offices in High Holborn two or three times a week, battled against odds with a cheerful pertinacity which was bound in the end to succeed. In the spring of 1923 the welcome stream of patriotic contributions in silver and copper was suddenly swollen by a munificent donation of £50,000, at the time tendered anonymously, but now known to have been the gift of Sir James Caird. As a consequence, Sir Doveton Sturdee had the satisfaction of asking the Admiralty to proceed at once with the work of reconditioning; and on a glorious "First of June" in 1923 repairs were inaugurated in ceremonial fashion, and, out of honour to the day, by Lord Howe.

On Trafalgar Day, 1924, Sir Doveton Sturdee decided to close the "Save the *Victory*" appeal. It was not that the necessary funds had been collected. £150,000 had been asked for, and hardly more than half that amount had been subscribed. But the Admiral of the Fleet held firmly to the opinion that an appeal which ran for more than two years would bring to the public mind feelings of weariness and ennui which might, if prolonged, defeat the very ends he desired to serve. He argued, likewise, that a fund which already exceeded £75,000 would provide for the structural safety of the ship's fabric; and if the British public at a later stage felt dissatisfied that the restoration was incomplete, the British public had the remedy in its own pocket, from which further disbursements could be made.

To-day, it is unhappily only too evident that,

after two solid years of unremitting toil, Sir Doveton Sturdee was beginning to feel the exhausting effects of a campaign which had carried him throughout the length and breadth of the country to plead for the ship he loved. At the beginning of 1925 he complained of ill-health, and he died on May 7th. At the last general meeting of the Society over which he presided he urged those present to assist him in turning his fund "into round figures," and before his death he had the satisfaction of learning that the total amounted to £80,000.

Since Sir Doveton Sturdee's death the *Victory* Restoration Fund has been increased to over £103,000, entirely by voluntary contributions; and though additional money is still required before expenses, already incurred and still to be incurred, can be met, no doubts can be entertained that what is still required will be forthcoming. For, from the day of her launch, H.M.S. *Victory* has never once been compelled to acknowledge defeat.

Meanwhile, in the six years that have passed since the work of restoration began, a great change has come over the ship, a strangely mysterious metamorphosis, like that which converted the old hag of the nursery-tale into a fairy of radiant loveliness. All the imperfections and disfigurements and anachronisms have vanished and the *Victory* has recaptured the beauty that was hers when she flew Nelson's flag at her mast-head. The graceful bow, with its rails and brackets and spandrels, has been constructed afresh; the stern has been refashioned; and the backbone of the vessel, twisted and racked though it is with extreme old age, now snuggles cosily into a magic wall of concrete, which, moulding itself to the sag and droop of the keel, obliterates them, and (at the same time) lifts the ship so high above the dock floor that, with correct trim, the

*Victory* seems to float, if not in water, then in air, with the sides of the dock (where the spectator stands) suggesting the water-level. This cunning arrangement makes it possible also for the same spectator to leave the imaginary water-level and descend by a solid staircase to the real bottom of the dock, and from that point of vantage to obtain a view of the ship which Nelson himself never had—the entire underwater body poised above him, its mighty mass rigidly curved like the vaulting of a cathedral roof. Nor, with two thousand tons above him, need the spectator have any qualms, for on either side of the vast convexity, between the body of the ship and the walls of the dock, massive steel buttresses support the *Victory* as easily as human fingers would support a diminutive model.

But better pleased will be the spectator who lifts his eyes aloft to where masts and spars raise themselves skywards in an interlacing maze of unforgettable beauty. With the magic of distance throwing its enchantments upon him, the spectator will do well to inform himself as to the dimensions of some of the ropes, all of them of real hemp, made on purpose for the restoration. If he knew, for example, that the shrouds, supporting the fore and main masts, are eleven inches in circumference, the forestay eighteen inches, and the mainstay nineteen, he could amuse himself by computing the height of the fore topmast or the girth of the main topsail yard.

Within the ship, or “inboard,” as we should say, the Restoration Committee has been confronted with no problem comparable in magnitude with that of the vessel’s external support or the security of full-sized masts and spars in a rigid vessel in winter gales. Inboard, reconditioning has proceeded at a steady pace, delayed only by the tedious process of searching for evidence among uncatalogued docu-

ments, body-plans, profiles, and sheer-draughts. As the years have sped by, decks have been restored to their original condition; guns have been re-mounted; capstans and pumps put in order; a belfry erected and a binnacle provided; a firehearth or galley to cook for over nine hundred men; nettings set along the bulwarks for the stowage of hammocks; and round-shot placed in the shot-racks. In 1927 the cabins began to recover their old appearance: the Master's and Secretary's opening upon the quarter-deck; the Lieutenants' and others opening upon the Ward Room; the Surgeon's, Gunner's, and Purser's down below on the Orlop. The Captain's accommodation and the Admiral's began to take shape; and it became possible at last to see where Nelson slept and took his meals, held councils, and wrote dispatches.

By the summer of 1928 so much had been done, and work was in so forward a state in regard to hull, rigging, decks, and cabins, that His Majesty graciously consented to visit the ship and so inaugurate a new epoch in her illustrious career. After spending the best part of an hour on board, interesting himself in every kind of detail and making suggestions for further improvements, His Majesty unveiled a tablet with the following inscription:—

"H.M.S. VICTORY" LAID DOWN 1759 LAUNCHED  
1765 WAS AFTER 157 YEARS OF SERVICE  
PLACED 1922 IN HER PRESENT BERTH THE  
OLDEST DOCK IN THE WORLD AND RESTORED  
TO HER CONDITION AS AT TRAFALGAR  
UNDER THE SUPERINTENDENCE OF THE  
SOCIETY FOR NAUTICAL RESEARCH.  
TO COMMEMORATE THE COMPLETION  
OF THE WORK THIS TABLET WAS UNVEILED  
ON 17TH JULY 1928 BY  
H.M. KING GEORGE V.

Since the King's visit one at least of his suggestions has been put into effect, and a beginning has been made with the important task of assembling in the more important cabins the actual furniture that was there on the eve of the great battle. In particular the Admiral's Dining-Table, Sideboard, and Wine-cooler, which were removed after Trafalgar and disposed of in Portugal in order that the fore-cabin might be converted into a mortuary Chapel for Nelson's lying-in-state, have now come home from Portugal for this very purpose, and by the kindness of their owner have been deposited on loan in their old position, looking for all the world as if they had never left it. But much more in this way remains to be done. The Ward Room urn, with subdivisions for brewing black tea and green, has been restored; but as yet there is no Ward Room sideboard on which to set it; nor Ward Room dining-table either. None of Hardy's effects have as yet been unearthed; and Nelson's own State room cries aloud for equipment. Happily some of the Admiral's most precious pieces have been promised, including the Bureau at which he wrote the codicil to his Will, his last letters home, and the famous Prayer before battle. It would be injudicious to place, above his Bureau, the miniature and the pencil portrait of the two beings he loved best, which we know were there and which are now too precious for any custody but a safe. There is no reason, however, why replicas should not be made, to give the cabin the aspect it wore on the eve of Trafalgar. And what is true of Nelson's quarters is true of the whole ship. It is much to be hoped that, before very long, the interest of all parts will be enhanced by the re-assemblage of *Victory* gear at present scattered to the four quarters of the globe.

The Restoration of the *Victory* has entailed a vast

amount of research. It would have been a comparatively easy matter to have given the ship the appearance she wore at her launch in 1765; but she was practically rebuilt between the years 1801 and 1803, and no other shape than that which Nelson knew would have given universal satisfaction. Enough of the Trafalgar structure has survived in most parts of the ship to suggest clues to follow up among sheer-draughts and documents. Doubt, however, still remains in regard to some few points; the form, for example, which the Gun Room should take; and, more surprising perhaps, the Figure-head. What evidence there is as to the latter confirms the belief that at Trafalgar the Royal Arms at the bow were supported by Cupids, or amorini. But the engravers, who represented them pictorially, show nobler figures, in a more dignified attitude, than those with which to-day we are familiar.

The wide extent of the research conducted for the restoration of the *Victory* has produced a wealth of material which was not of course available when this book first came to be written. The bulk of additional information, however, is of a kind intelligible only to experts; and once accepted and assimilated, hardly distinguishable even by them. It will certainly not be required by those who desire to make their first acquaintance with the *Victory* and her story. For this reason the text of the book stands practically the same as in the first edition. A few errors have been corrected and a few redundant footnotes excised. But this is all the change that has been made in Chapters One to Eleven.

In the "Epilogue" there has been no change at all; and a word or two will suffice to show the reason. The Epilogue might quite conveniently have been swept away altogether; for now that the course which it recommended has been carried into effect,

its admonitions are superfluous. But inasmuch as Time, which works its own wonders, has converted the Epilogue from a dream into a reality, its retention may, perhaps, be justified as a humble contribution to the chronicles of the Ship. As such it must preserve its original form untampered with and intact; for its blemishes and imperfections, like the cobwebs in a wine-bin, at least serve to authenticate its date.

GEOFFREY CALLENDER

ROYAL NAVAL COLLEGE, GREENWICH,  
*Spring, 1929*

*Author's rights in this little book have been transferred to the "Victory" Committee in the hope that some small profit may accrue to the Restoration Fund, which is still in need of assistance.*





*Over Time's misty tide-stream sailing,  
Stirring the heart like the throbbing of drums,  
Banners of conquest and bravery trailing,  
Out of the past she comes.  
How shall we honour her? How shall we name her?  
What shall her blazon be?  
Flagship of Nelson, Flagship of England,  
Victory's "Victory".*



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## PROLOGUE

### THE HOUR OF HER BIRTH

*The plans were drawn and the cost was reckoned  
In the closing days of George the Second.*

THE story of the *Victory* carries us back more than a century and a half. In December 1758 King George II's ministers decided to invite the sanction of the House of Commons for an ambitious shipbuilding programme in the following year. In all there were to be twelve ships of the line, "battleships" they would be called to-day. Of these twelve vessels, nine were to be put in hand at once; and at the head of the list stood a first-rate of a hundred guns. Her name was not decided upon; but she was to be fashioned after the model of the *Royal George*, then the most celebrated battleship afloat. The dockyard where she was to be constructed was Chatham.

It was very appropriate that this particular vessel should be put in hand in the year 1759. For 1759 was the year of "Victories." In 1759 came the climax of the Seven Years' War, which was to convert the island fortress of England into the far-flung British Empire on which the sun never sets. Under the inspired guidance of Mr. Pitt, Navy and Army worked together with unparalleled success. North America was wrested from the French. The predominance of England in India was established by the victories of Clive. The armies of Louis XV were vanquished on the field of Minden; his ships were flung and burnt upon the coast of Portugal. General

Wolfe, to achieve a dazzling success, carried a British army up the face of a cliff in the pitchy blackness of midnight. And Admiral Hawke, with the same end in view, carried a British fleet amid rocks and shoals with the storm-wind howling through the gathering dusk and the breakers thundering on a dead lee-shore.

Truly there was much to talk about in 1759. And the good news spread rapidly: although the mails were still carried by post-boys who, with a great leather bag across their shoulders and a noisy post-horn ever at their lips, galloped along the Dover and Portsmouth roads, stopping at each stage to quench their thirst, until they drew rein and alighted in London streets.

London streets in 1759 were almost as noisy as they are to-day. They were paved with cobblestones, and the clatter occasioned when the coaches rattled over them was deafening. This dinning uproar formed a deep accompaniment to an almost infinite diversity of sounds produced by the street-criers. There were girls selling lavender and rosemary, laces and ribbons and almanacs and watercress and shrimps. There were men selling eggs and butter and gingerbread and scissors and brooms and coal and fresh water. All these raised their voices to advertise their wares, singing lustily or chanting in monotone. Occasional fantasias were contributed by rat-catchers, knife-grinders, chair-menders, and the vendors of old clothes. Even in the shops, where such existed, the apprentices kept up an incessant call, "Who'll buy? Who'll buy? Who'll buy?"

Up and down the streets passed the gaily-dressed crowd: the gentlemen in knee-breeches, wide-skirted coats, long waistcoats, and lace cravats; some in blue, some in crimson, some in scarlet, and some in purple; the macaronis in plum-colour,

French grey, or canary yellow; the poor man in bottle green or russet brown. But colour everywhere; and wigs—tie wigs, drop wigs, long bobs or bags. Your man about town generally carried his three-cornered hat under his left arm, and when he met a lady of his acquaintance exchanged his clouded cane from right hand into left, brought the red heels of his neat black buckled shoes together with a click, and emphasized the homage of his low bow by sweeping his hat in a wide circle across her path and resting it a moment on his breast. His snuff-box was for ever in evidence, for smoking was still considered a rather vulgar accomplishment. The long clay and the short were pieces of furniture ill becoming the days of brocade. They were smoked in the garden and in the inn-parlour, but not in the presence of ladies, and never in the streets. Cigarettes were still awaiting the day of their introduction.

The ladies of 1759 wore dresses or sacques of flowered silk and watered tabby. Very dainty figures they were with their hooped skirts and tiny waists, with their powdered hair and patches, absurd little hats and monstrous muffs. They thought it smart to have a monkey or marmoset for a pet to fondle, and were followed by a little negro waiting-boy with a flaming turban. They were very much addicted to perfumes, purchasing pomander and bergamot, and many other essences, of Mrs. Holt at the Two Olive Posts in the broad part of the Strand.

In fashionable circles the hour for dinner was getting later and later. No one now dreamed of dining at one o'clock, and those of the mode did not sit down till four. Card-parties were all the rage, and loo the favourite game. The favourite outdoor sports were bull-baiting and bear-baiting. But even more popular was the cockpit, where much money changed hands in wagers and many a noble bird

was slain. Another diversion that never failed to draw was a public execution. Monday was hanging-day, and the élite would hire a window in close proximity to Newgate and make up picnic parties and spend the time in a vastly agreeable fashion witnessing the last moments of some noted thief or smuggler or highwayman.

The gay world conveyed itself from ball to rout either in the sedan chair or in the rumbling hackney coach. The sensation of the moment was to ride in one-horse chairs, called cabriolets, the very latest importation from France. But by most people these were considered engines of mischief, too risky for sober folk.

Much wine was drunk, and gout was the prevailing affliction in the "best" circles. Influenza was common enough, too, under the name of ague. "Gascoign's Powders" were the popular remedy in 1759.

In 1759 the first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy* were published, and took the town by storm. In 1759 Oliver Goldsmith produced his earliest book. In 1759 Josiah Wedgwood set up his factory for the improvement of British porcelain; and Smeaton, still hard at work on the Eddystone Lighthouse, was carving the words "Laus Deo" on the topmost round of stone. In 1759 those who were fortunate enough to have secured sittings went to have their portraits painted by Joshua Reynolds, and a larger public thronged the circles and amphitheatre of Drury Lane to witness the inimitable acting of Davy Garrick.

But the most familiar figure in London streets in 1759 was Doctor Johnson. Everyone in Fleet Street knew him well. Indeed, there was no mistaking him. In his rusty brown suit of clothes, old shrivelled unpowdered wig too small for his head, loose knee-



breeches, and black worsted stockings ill drawn up, he shambled and shuffled along the pavements, biting his nails, counting his footsteps, going over the same ground again to re-count them, talking to himself, swinging his cudgel, and blowing out his breath like a whale. In 1759 he was in great distress, for his favourite negro servant had run away to sea to serve in His Majesty's frigate *Stag*. "No man will be a sailor," said the Doctor testily, "who has contrivance to get himself into gaol; for being in a ship is being in a gaol, with the chance of being drowned." Not that we must take this utterance too seriously, for the great man in his *Dictionary* defined the opposite words "windward" and "leeward" in terms identically the same, thereby proclaiming that in no respect was he more characteristically English than in his ignorance of things appertaining to the sea.

After the King and Mr. Pitt and Doctor Johnson, there was no name more frequently on men's lips than that of the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Anson. By wonderful adventures on his journey round the world he had made of himself a hero with the youth of the nation second only to Robinson Crusoe. By his overwhelming victory against the French off Cape Finisterre he had established his fame as a great fleet-commander. Everyone remembered how the treasure he had taken came rumbling through London in an endless procession of wagons guarded by a naval and military escort; nor was there a boy in London ignorant of the fact that it was Lord Anson who had put the officers of the Navy into the smartest of debonair uniforms. Yet one would have looked in vain among London streets for a glimpse of the First Lord's person. He was not a figure in the public eye like Doctor Johnson. He was a recluse. He was almost a hermit.

But he slaved in the interests of the public weal from early morn to dewy eve. You see, he was not only responsible for the conduct of naval affairs in Mr. Pitt's war, still raging, but he had the 1759 ship-building programme to think of, and first on the list the aforementioned vessel, a one-hundred-gun ship of the line.

To see the improved *Royal George* laid down in the royal dockyard, an Admiralty official would have had to toil down to Chatham by the stage coach. This journey, though brief compared with the fortnight of travel that still separated London from Edinburgh, must have been tedious according to modern notions. And yet there were compensations. For at least you were out of doors. And to run through the cherry orchards or hop-gardens of Kent behind a spanking team of horses was an invigorating tonic for the town-dweller. And the weather in 1759 was heavenly: perpetual skies of unflecked blue and Neapolitan sunshine.

# THE STORY OF H.M.S. "VICTORY"

## CHAPTER I BUILDING HER

*Day by day the vessel grew,  
With timbers fashioned strong and true,  
Stemson and keelson and sternson knee,  
Till, framed with perfect symmetry,  
A skeleton ship rose up to view!  
And around the bows and along the side  
The heavy hammer and mallet plied,  
Till after many a week, at length,  
Wonderful for form and strength,  
Sublime in its enormous bulk,  
Loomed aloft the shadowy bulk.*—LONGFELLOW.

MR. THOMAS SLADE, afterwards Sir Thomas Slade, designed the first-class battleship that figured at the head of the shipbuilding programme of 1759. He was at the time Senior Surveyor of the Navy—that is, the elder of two officers invested with the charge of building and repairing the royal ships. From early years he had studied the theory and practice of shipbuilding, not only in the treatises of Duhamel and Mungo Murray, but, like Peter the Great of Russia, in the dockyard itself. In 1759 he was at the very head of his profession; and as the architect of the most famous ship that ever sailed the seas he deserves to be remembered and honoured.

His portrait hangs in the Royal Naval Museum, Greenwich.

Notice of what was required was given to him in 1758. The still unchristened first-rate, he was given to understand, was to be the finest engine of naval warfare ever constructed; a nobler vessel even than the *Royal George*, her predecessor. She was also to be so shaped that she would be able to carry in her hold water and provisions for four months at the lowest computation. And she was to be so constructed that she would carry herself with the port sills of her gun deck at least six feet from the water.

Mr. Slade set to work with a will. His task was congenial, and he put his very soul into it. In little more than six months his plans and designs were completed, and in June 1759 they received the approval of the Admiralty. From Whitehall they were conveyed by trusty messengers to Chatham and handed to Mr. Allen, Master Shipwright of His Majesty's Dockyard.

Ordinary ships of the line in King George's day spent their early days in a cradle, and when sufficiently grown to move by themselves, were released from leading strings, and slid stern foremost down the ways. Why stern foremost it is difficult to say. Perhaps because from the time of Noah men have drawn their boats from the flood bows first and launched them again vice versa: perhaps because the impetus of a ship upon the ways called for a speedy check, and the breadth of the stern offered most resistance to the water.

But Mr. Slade's new vessel was to be no ordinary ship; on the contrary, a mammoth of the fighting line. For her the everyday devices would not serve. Her birthright entitled her to be built in a dry-dock, so that, when she was finished, the waves might come at her bidding and submissively offer their

homage to a ruler of the sea. The berth chosen by Mr. Allen, Master Shipwright to the King, was "Old Single Dock," near the house of the Admiral Superintendent and opposite the dockyard clock.

It was on July 23, 1759, that the keel of the ship was laid—a proceeding of vast importance. Stout oaken blocks were placed on the floor of the dock at intervals of four or five feet from one another, and upon these the great backbone of the vessel was laid down. In size the keel was one hundred and fifty feet long and twenty inches square. As less liable than any other kind of wood to splinter or split or shrink, teak was used for this vital part of the ship. The separate pieces were carefully shaped and fitted and scarfed and welded and hammered and bolted together, until they assumed the indivisible unity essential for perfect strength. To safeguard the under side from injury by rubbing and abrasion, a false keel of elm four or five inches thick was applied and fixed to the teak. And now the air was full of the sound of sawing, and filing, and hammering, and clinching, and grinding. Mallets and hatchets and axes and adzes were busy from morn till night. And as the great limbs of the vessel were made, "Old Single Dock" took to itself the appearance of a monstrous house; for a roof was built overhead to shelter the workmen as they plied their tools and to shield the vessel's timbers from the rain.

After the keel, the next parts of the vessel to be constructed were the stem and stern posts. The stem-post was built, like the keel, of separate pieces scarfed together. But the stern-post was made of a single tree. To it the rudder was fixed by huge iron hooks and eyes, and the strain of a constant plunging motion was best withstood by a solid block.

Next, from either side of the keel rose the shapely ribs of the ship. These were more difficult to frame,

perhaps, than any other part of the vessel's anatomy. They had to be stout and strong and firm, for like the keel and posts their function was to uphold and support. But in addition they had to assume gracefully rounded curves; for it was their business to mould the vessel's shape—her curves and depression and contours. Trees of a particular form were required, and, if they had to be looked for, work might be delayed for months before the natural bend was discovered. But the requirements of Mr. Slade's ship being known long before, oak a hundred years old if a day had been waiting a twelvemonth beforehand.

When stem-post and stern-post and keel and ribs were finished to the master builder's satisfaction, the skeleton of the vessel was complete. Up to this point the work had consumed one year and a little over. For the second year it was usual to cease work altogether, in order that the framework might for a long period be open to all the winds that blow, to wet weather and dry, to storm and sun, until it was thoroughly seasoned. The Admiralty indeed, with respect to this particular ship, had ordained unusual haste. The vessel, they said, must be ready for sea in thirty-three months at the farthest. Now a ship of the line, as a general rule, required from five to ten years in the building; five years if everything went well, and more than five years if the seasoning were prolonged or general progress delayed by shortage of material. The thirty-three months of the Admiralty's ordaining would have meant incessant labour: one gang working while daylight lasted and another relieving them at night and toiling under cressets and flares. But the effect of Hawke's great victory at Quiberon by now began to declare itself, and when, in August 1760, the Senior Surveyor of the Navy came down to Chatham

to see the finished frame, the need of haste had vanished. Hands were discharged. Labour slackened. Vacation had begun.

In building a wooden wall of Old England the master shipwright made use of oak, almost to the exclusion of all other trees. No other kind of wood had the rugged quality that was requisite. No other kind of wood had a tithe of the oak-tree's durability. The quantity of material consumed in the construction of a single ship was astonishing. Thousands of trees were cut down and acres of woodland disforested. For the oak-tree, if tough, is stumpy compared with the beech or pine, and the logs that were sent to the dockyard were short for the purpose they served. Innumerable cartloads were in consequence necessary; for a first-rate ship of the line required three hundred thousand cubic feet of timber.

This would have been well enough if there had been all the forests of the world to draw upon—if, for example, the limitless tracts of woodland in Canada could have been utilized. Unfortunately, there was no oak in creation like British oak. Canadian lumbermen set to work, and their planks were given a trial. But the timber would not last, and the experiment was not renewed. Towards the close of the eighteenth century the supply of British oak was diminishing so appreciably as to cause alarm in the minds of those best able to gauge the Navy's requirements. Admiral Collingwood in his brief spells ashore never went a walk through the glades and brakes without a pocketful of acorns. But the ship-builders required oak-trees a century old, and long before Collingwood's seedlings could have offered very much shade the country's supply of suitable trees must have been exhausted. The perfecting of the steam-engine and the need of protection against

great guns compelled shipbuilders to resort to a new material. But even if Watt and John Scott Russell had never been born, and the Crimean War had never been fought, iron must have been used in the absence of oak for the hulls of sailing-ships.

In earlier days the chief source of supply was the forest of the Weald in Kent. And this was conveniently placed for the royal dockyards of the Thames—Deptford, Woolwich, and Chatham. But at the end of George II's reign the New Forest supplied the bulk of the timber, and the difficulties attending its transference to the yards, by river, road, and canal, added considerably to the cost of a vessel's construction. Small and busy little centres in consequence grew up in the creeks and estuaries of Hampshire. The visitor to summer Solent seas who steers his boat up the Beaulieu River will pass through a wonderland of sylvan beauty, each bend of the stream affording fresh peeps into fairy glades and avenues. And just as the water begins to shoal and the woven copses retreat from the margin, he will see a little grass knoll and a street of red-brick cottages standing sideways on its breast. This is Buckler's Hard. This is where the *Euryalus* was built, Nelson's trusty frigate at Trafalgar. This is where the *Agamemnon* was built, not a little frigate at all, if you please, but Nelson's first ship of the line. And this is where the famous *Bellerophon* was built—the *Bellerophon* that fought so nobly at the glorious First of June, at the Nile, and at Trafalgar—the *Bellerophon* that received the surrender of Napoleon and brought the great conqueror to England.

It's a far cry from the Beaulieu River to the Medway, whither we must now return.

The framework of the ship being duly seasoned, the workmen returned to their labours. The next thing to add was the planking. If the keel gave the



vessel her backbone and the curving timbers her ribs, then the planking provided her skin. This skin or integument was double: there was an outer cuticle and an inner. The outer consisted of oaken planks no less than eight inches thick. These planks were sawn a year before they were required and piled up in the yard with battens placed between; and the air passing freely through the stack completed the process of seasoning that had begun in the forest. The planks on removal from the pile were fastened to the stem and ribs by stout oaken pins called treenails (pronounced *trennels*). The ribs, of course, were completely covered, but a portion of the stem-post remained visible, and to this was attached the "cutwater." The planking extended to the stern-post in the underwater portion of the hull; but above the water-line it bent in a right-angled turn to form the vessel's counter and transom. The inner cuticle of a wooden wall was not so thick as the outer, but it supplied five inches of solid oak; and these, with the outer planking and ribs, gave the gunner on board a ship of the line a wooden wall of twenty-four inches to protect him from the missiles of the enemy.

Integral parts of the ship's structure not yet mentioned were the beams. These were stout timbers that stretched from one wall of a ship to the other, from port to starboard, from starboard to port. They defined the breadth of the vessel, and in so doing gave their name to its measurement. For the "beam" of a vessel is a vessel's breadth, and a broad-bottomed ship is described as "beamy." The beams were connected with either side of the vessel, and kept in position by strong brackets of oak and iron, which from their shape were known as "knees." The function of the beams was to support the deck, whose planks were laid athwart them.

The wooden wall of a battleship's side resembled a wall of brick or stone in one particular. The various blocks or pieces of which it was composed presented little gaps or clefts through which the searching water might find an entrance. To prevent this the shipwrights caulked the seams with oakum; that is to say, they pushed and hammered into the interstices and grooves the untwisted strands of old rope, which they afterwards soaked with a preparation of hot pitch and tar.<sup>1</sup> From time to time the caulking required renewal, just as the wall of a house occasionally requires to be re-pointed and re-dressed. When need arose, the caulkers were slung over the bulwarks astride of their boxes to ply again their beetles and caulking-irons and pay the vessel's seams, even as now they paid those of the *Victory*, still busily building in Old Single Dock of His Majesty's yard at Chatham.

<sup>1</sup> The seams of a deck were caulked in the same way. Hence arose the seaman's phrase "taking a caulk," which meant to lie on the deck and enjoy a snooze at the risk of spoiling one's clothes.

## CHAPTER II

### CHOOSING HER NAME

*Nine hundred men on board you have,  
A jolly crew both stout and brave  
As ever did put out to sea.  
God send safe home the "Victory!"*

BALLAD OF 1744.

*O thou proud vessel! whose tremendous claim  
So well is proved to "Victory's" splendid name.*

MARY SEWELL.

MIDWAY between birth and christening, between the laying of the keel and the launching of the ship, came the time to select a suitable name. This was always a matter for grave and deliberate reflection. There were a certain number of names which were reserved on purpose for first-rates. Among these we may notice the *Britannia*, *Royal Sovereign*, *Victory*; and the name of the reigning monarch—*Royal Charles*, *James*, or *George*. Now of these none could be more suitable than *Victory*, especially at the conclusion of the Seven Years' War, when the slight element of boastfulness in the title was certainly justifiable.

But though *Victory* suggested itself readily enough, there was an objection. The name was inseparably connected in the minds of men with one of the most appalling disasters in the annals of the sea, a calamity comparable with the loss of Sir Clowdisley Shovel in the *Association*; to the capsizing of the *Royal George* at Portsmouth or the *Captain* off Cape Finisterre;

to the ramming of the *Victoria* by the *Camperdown*, or the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912.

In 1744, when Anson returned from his voyage round the world to find England at war with both France and Spain, and when Bonnie Prince Charlie was putting the finishing touches to his preparations for the recovery of the English crown, the *Victory* was the finest ship afloat; her tonnage the noblest, her armament the heaviest. She was the pride of the narrow seas. But in 1744 she had a journey to go. A convoy of British merchantmen on their way to the Mediterranean had been forced into Lisbon and blockaded there by the enemies of King George. It was resolved to release them, and the *Victory* gathered round her a fleet of twenty-one ships, and weighed anchor without loss of time. At her mast-head flew the flag of Admiral Sir John Balchen, who left a comfortable berth as Governor of Greenwich Hospital in order to conduct the expedition. Sir John was a veteran of quite exceptional experience. Entering the Navy as a cabin-boy at the end of King Charles II's reign, he had served under Shovel, Benbow, and Rooke, and commanded the *Shrewsbury* with distinction at the battle of Cape Passaro, earning a reputation second to none as an officer of judgment and discretion.

Everything went well on the outward journey. The Channel Fleet of course was irresistible. The task assigned was easily accomplished. The imprisoned convoy was released. The *Victory* and her squadron turned home again. But as they struck soundings at the mouth of the Channel a gale of unprecedented fury arose, attended by thunder, lightning, and rain. Canvas was shortened; but the wind increased in violence from the south-west, and the ships were scattered and ran for home. In little groups of one, two, and three, they gradually

made their way into Spithead. Some were dismayed; some hardly kept themselves afloat with all hands at the pumps. All were shattered, but all in time came in—all, that is, of the twenty-one ships that had proudly mustered round the *Victory* for the outward journey. But the *Victory* herself did not come.

Men refused then, as they have done on many occasions since, to believe that anything evil could have happened. They assured themselves with good reason that the flagship of the Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet was the safest ship that ever had been launched; that she was practically new, or at most but a year or two old; that of all the ships that composed the fleet she was best able to take care of herself; and that the superlative quality of her workmanship made her, so far as the word could be used of ships, unsinkable. Twenty-four hours passed, and still no news. Some people began to fear the worst. But the stouter-hearted folk reminded them that the ship was manned by a picked crew, every hand a thrice-tried seaman, and the admiral a hero of a hundred fights against whirlwind, storm, and blast. Besides, had he not with him an exceptional freight? Had not his cruise been regarded as an education in itself? Had not the Admiralty seized the occasion to send in one ship more than eighty midshipmen? Would they have done so if there had been anything to fear? The vessel, too, had an unusual complement—nine hundred and seventy-five men. The matter, when regarded without excitement, was easily explained. The admiral had not followed his consorts to Spithead. He had found some other haven in the storm.

A week of the most horrible suspense went by, and misgivings multiplied.

When last seen by her companions, the *Victory*

was off St. Martin's, in the Scilly Isles. This was at half-past three o'clock on the afternoon of October 4th. The next news came from the coast of France. Cross-channel packets from Alderney brought word that about midnight on the selfsame 4th of October guns had been heard as from a ship in distress, struggling off the rock-bound coast. Others put the hour at two o'clock in the early morning of October 5th, and declared that they had observed the flash of the guns. They had counted at the least full ninety reports, from which they had argued the presence of a three-decker warship, seeing that it would have been impossible in such weather to load and reload. Assistance, of course, had been impossible with the sea a cauldron of boiling foam and the night as black as pitch.

A search-party at once set out, and though but very little was discovered, the sad relics told their own tale. No bodies were washed up on the coast. But there was a portmanteau flung ashore, filled with linen marked "Cotterell," and Captain Cotterell was the *Victory's* captain of marines. No vestiges were seen of the vessel's hull, but spars were found, and the wooden carriages of quarter-deck guns. And all these were marked *Victory*. The fragments were eloquent. The great ship had run on a shoal near the Casquets, where the *Stella* struck in 1899. She had foundered with all hands.

When the sorrow and pity aroused by the disaster were in part assuaged and the period of mourning over, a certain section of the public, led by Admiral Vernon, demanded a public inquiry, contending that the vessel was faultily constructed. The Government willingly acquiesced, and, as in the case of the *Titanic* Commission, ordered a model of the ship to be prepared. No pains were spared. For the designer of the *Victory* was put upon his trial, and was deter-

mined to show that so far as his work was concerned there was nothing at all amiss. There are scale models at South Kensington, at Greenwich, and at the Royal United Service Museum. All of them are beautifully made, and should be examined by anyone interested in the old wooden ships of Great Britain. But the most elaborate model and the most careful ever made is the model of Admiral Sir John Balchen's *Victory* in the Royal Naval Museum, Greenwich.

The inquiry into the loss of H.M.S. *Victory* exonerated every person concerned. It proved beyond question that the ship herself was the finest ever launched, and a credit to the shipbuilder's art. The Court agreed that the admiral would have saved the ship if any man alive could have done so. But circumstances were too strong for him, and the weather alone was to blame. So a monument was erected to the admiral in Westminster Abbey, and attempts were made to honour the dead by comforting the living.

But the tragedy of 1744 was still a vivid memory in 1761. With those who were superstitious—and what seaman is not superstitious?—the name of the *Victory* was, like that of the *White Ship*, a name of ill omen. And yet beyond doubt it was a good name, and an appropriate name, and a significant. It had been the partner of misfortune in the past. But that was no reason why in the future it should not be the symbol and ensign of success.

Thus the name of the newly-born was settled and a cause of uneasiness to her god-parents removed.

### CHAPTER III

## HER FORM AND FIGURE

*Such was the sculptured prow; from van to rear  
Th' artillery frowned, a black tremendous tier!  
Embalmed with orient gum, above the wave  
The swelling sides a yellow radiance gave.*—FALCONER.

THE 7th of May, 1765, was the day appointed for the *Victory's* launch. By that time much had been done, though much remained to do. Before any water was admitted to the dock, before the stands were filled with fashionable crowds, before the bottle of champagne was sent crashing against the vessel's bows, before the band struck up "Rule, Britannia!"—before, in short, the christening name was bestowed amid every attendant circumstance of happiest augury—the hull of the vessel was complete. As yet there was no rigging; as yet there were no sails or spars. And three flagstaffs, filling for a time the positions of the masts, made a somewhat vain struggle to remove the unfinished appearance of the ship above the level of the bulwarks. But at least the flags made a brave show. At the fore staff flew the Admiralty flag, with its golden anchor on a red ground; at the main staff flew the Royal Standard with its quarterings, and at the mizzen flew the Union flag of Britain.

Thus dressed, the *Victory* first felt the waves lift her up and curdle into cream about her bows.

Six years had passed since the First Lord's building order had arrived at Chatham and work upon



her keel had been begun. Since then much water had flowed under Rochester Bridge. The Seven Years' War, which in 1759 was at its height, had been brought to an end. The old King, who had won the hearts of his adopted people by his bravery at Dettingen, had gone the way of all flesh. His grandson, King George III, endowed with youth, a handsome face, and a regal bearing, had already scattered the popularity which had acclaimed his accession. That dreadful Mr. Wilkes, with the cast in his eye, held sway in the popular imagination. Mr. Pitt had been turned out of office. Lord Anson, the circumnavigator and the organizer of victory, was no longer alive to witness the launch of the proudest vessel he had planned.

Six years! A visitor to Chatham on the 7th of May would have been obliged to admit that the time had been well spent. For the ship presented a truly formidable appearance, a mass of material so vast and yet so shapely. It seemed incredible that human brain could ever have dared to conceive her or human hands have brought her to the birth. And she was not merely vast, but beautiful as well.

It is not possible to say with absolute precision how her walls and sides were painted. In after-days Nelson evolved his own pattern, and his hold upon men's hearts popularized it in the service as a whole. But at the time of the *Victory's* launch Nelson was only six years old and indifferent to such matters. There was as yet no uniformity of colour-scheme for men-of-war. Captains were left to their own devices, and their tastes were only restricted by the expensiveness of paint and the difficulty of procuring other shades and colours than those which the dockyard approved. Restriction did, however, tend to standardize matters, and we may feel pretty sure that the *Victory* was painted very much like other ships.

Below the water-line her belly was white, like the belly of a fish. A copper sheathing at a later date covered her underwater timbers; but no efficacious antidote to barnacles and worms had been discovered in 1765. Above the white, and in the region of the water-line, came a broad belt of black. Above this the vessel's sides wore a dull yellow tinge, occasioned by coats of varnish. The upper works and bulwarks were more gaudily decorated. Blue was used, especially in the stern works, and scarlet was added by way of relief. Touches of gilt were very popular with the ship's painters, and were freely added when the paint was obtainable. Green was never used; its cost was prohibitive. Fawn colour was employed for the cabins, and for the ward-room and the gun-room. White with gold moulding was considered appropriate for the upper deck. The masts, like the sides of the ship, were yellow with varnish. But the spars that crossed them were black, to match the standing rigging and dead-eyes. Below the upper deck, one colour only was employed, and that was scarlet. Its use is said to have originated with Admiral Robert Blake. The wisdom of his choice is clear enough. Accustomed every day of their lives to have the colour round them, the seamen noticed nothing on the walls to appal them in the carnage of battle. Against a background of fawn or grey the splashes of blood would have been only too evident, and might in all but veteran crews have taken the heart from the fight. The inner sides of the port-lids or gun-port shutters, forming part of the gun-deck walls, were painted, of course, like the rest of the interior. They were raised—to admit of the guns being fired—by ropes, which were fitted to their lower rim, and drawn inboard through leaden pipes. And when they were raised, the drab of the sides was diversified by scarlet patches.

However straitly extravagance may have been curbed in the matter of paint as a general rule, no expense was spared with the figurehead. The figurehead was to a wooden wall what his wig is to a judge, what his sword is to an officer, what his crown is to a king—the symbol and emblem of station, the silent witness of dignity, the badge and ornament of rank. In this manner it was always regarded by the common seamen, insistent sticklers for ceremonial and outward rite. On one occasion, to be described below, the Channel Fleet was forced to retire before superior numbers. The movement was wise, but universally unpopular. On board the *Royal George* two men were discovered by the boatswain in the act of tying a scarf round the figurehead. The officer demanded explanations, and the seamen replied, "We're just taking a turn round his peepers, sir. We may be obliged to run away, but 'twere best, d'ye see, to keep *him* ignorant." They meant to say that the heart of oak was ashamed of the men who sailed aboard of her.

The figurehead of a ship was made of British elm. It was not constructed of a single piece, but of several sections fitted together. When the general shape was roughly hewn, the services of a figurehead sculptor were requisitioned. This gentleman was a specialist. He spent his whole time in carving figureheads, and this branch of imaginative art reached a high pitch of virtue under his chisel. The *Sovereign of the Seas*, England's first three-decker, had a group intended to represent King Edgar the Peaceful trampling seven monarchs underfoot. Anson's *Centurion* had a lion rampant, sixteen feet in height, red in colour, and crowned with a golden diadem. After its wonderful voyage round the world, this noble beast passed into the possession of the Duke of Richmond. From him it was begged by His Majesty King

William IV, who mounted it most becomingly at the head of the grand staircase at Windsor, but subsequently allowed it to be removed to what should have proved a permanent home in the Anson Ward at Greenwich Hospital. As a matter of fact, it was improperly cared for, and ultimately fell to pieces, though the off hind leg mounted on a shield is still the honoured possession of Lord Lichfield.

At one time, doubtless from motives of economy, an attempt was made by the Admiralty to stereotype the pattern of the figurehead and make a "lion" the guardian of every ship. But the ambitions of the carver were not to be confined within statutory limits. The *Royal Sovereign*, that carried Collingwood's flag at Trafalgar, had a life-size statue of King George III. The fighting *Temeraire* had a full-length figure of Mars, god of war, arrayed in all his shining panoply, with helmet, shield, and sword. As for the *Royal George*, the famous subject of Cowper's lament, she must indeed have looked most impressive. She had two white horses, one on either side of the bowsprit—creatures of mettle, rearing, prancing, and plunging in despite of bridle and rein.

It might be thought that the figurehead would have been peculiarly liable to breakages in battle. As a matter of fact it was not entirely free from accidents in time of peace, and on more occasions than one served as a kind of collision fender. For example, the story is told of the *Warrior*, Britain's earliest ironclad, that she once ran on board a sister ship, and left a mail-clad warrior in the *Royal Oak's* gun-room as evidence of the nature and extent of her guilt. But in battle damage was anticipated, and the figurehead was the subject of the tar's solicitude. Everything humanly possible was done to guard and protect it. And with this end in view the limbs and extremities were always made in detachable

pieces, to be unscrewed when occasion required. Accidents, however, must sometimes happen. At the "Glorious First of June" his royal highness the grand-ducal figurehead of the *Brunswick* lost his cocked hat. Whereupon the seamen borrowed from their captain's wardrobe, and repaired the damage before continuing the fight. So motherly indeed were the attentions of a ship's company to the personified spirit of their ship that a figurehead sometimes found itself clad in foul-weather garments from head to foot. These vestments, it must be admitted, not infrequently bore a strong resemblance to a canvas bag, and when this was the case, though the figurehead remained silent the captain often raised an objection. He argued that the rubbing and chafing of the canvas spoiled the paint underneath. How gorgeous this was, and how vivid its colour, may be seen from the picture of the combat between the *Queen Charlotte* and the *Mountain* on the Glorious First of June. This canvas, from the brush of De Loutherbourg, hangs in the Painted Hall at Greenwich.

The figurehead of the *Victory* was by no means characteristic of figureheads in general. It was more ambitious, more elaborate. The name of the vessel might have inspired the sculptor to model his carving on the great winged masterpiece of Samothrace. But if the idea presented itself, it was at once dismissed. The trophy when complete was a "group" figurehead like the figurehead of Admiral Balchen's ship, but infinitely more involved. It comprised a bust of His Majesty the King richly apparelled in coat of mail with a laurel wreath upon his head and the George upon his breast. Below the bust was a shield displaying the royal arms, and supported on either side by cherubim to represent the four winds of heaven. To the right of the royal effigy sat

Britannia trampling underfoot the figures of Envy, Discord, and Passion, and receiving at the hands of Peace the chaplet and palm of victory. Behind Britannia crouched the British Lion, with figures typifying Europe and America, this side of the group receiving support from below by a Genie holding a cornucopia filled with flowers and fruit. On the opposite side of the royal effigy appeared Victory in person, in her hand a crown of laurels and under her foot Rebellion, represented by a hydra with five alarming heads. Behind Victory fluttered Fame with her trumpet and figures to represent Asia and Africa, while support on this side was given from below by a Genie whose mastery of Navigation was symbolized by a globe and compasses.

Such a complex and diversified piece of sculpture would have been singularly out of place in a nineteenth-century man-of-war; for after the *Victory's* experience at Trafalgar no further proof was needed that the stem of a fighting-ship was needlessly weak and unresisting. Accordingly, at the suggestion of a famous naval architect, Sir Robert Seppings, a rounded tapering head was designed to save British ships, in part at least, from the punishment of enfilading fire. But Sir Thomas Slade's original designs for the *Victory*, from which Mr. Allen worked, followed closely the lines of contemporary ships. Seen end-on in Old Single Dock, the *Victory's* bows on either side of the cutwater were bluff to the last degree. They were cut as square as the face of the forecastle, which rose into a frowning platform above them. And perched low down in front of them, like a porch before a house, or perhaps more like a cow-catcher before an American engine, rose the beakhead.

Those who eventually abolished this characteristic and distinctive feature argued that it was more

ornamental than useful. And they were perfectly right. The beakhead had its conveniences. It tended to scatter advancing seas and prevent them from breaking on board; it occasionally offered a bridge for boarders when they stormed an enemy's ship; and, as it was easy of approach by doorways through the forecastle bulkhead or ladders from the fore-castle deck, it afforded a convenient foothold to those responsible for the rigging of the bowsprit. But there was no stoutness of defence about the beakhead, any more than there was in the flimsy partitions immediately abaft.

On the other hand, the beakhead made up in beauty whatever it may have lacked in solidity. The beams of which it was composed were bent into subtle plastic curves and laced and twisted and intertwined. Here carven mermaids made their home, stretching their limbs in their dainty way, or toying with scallop-shells and seaweed; here dolphins writhed in many a sinuous twirl; and knights and apostles all did their share in lending support to the fabric. The general effect was one of trellis or basket work, giving a rich floriated canopy to the figurehead, for which it served as a shrine.

Beneath the *Victory's* beakhead-rails winged Cupids rode upon dolphins, blew lustily upon trumpets, or held aloft for admiration Britannia's spear and shield. Certainly no part of the ship excited more interest or admiration among the crowd of sight-seers who assembled at Chatham to see the *Victory's* launch.

## CHAPTER IV

### FITTING HER OUT

*Oh! here is a master excelling in skill;  
And a gunner, none better we'll seek;  
And here is a boatswain, we'll work his good will;  
And a ship, boys, that never had leak.*

AS soon as the *Victory* had been tugged out of Old Single Dock into the wider world of the harbour, she was taken alongside of a sheer hulk. A sheer hulk was a dockyard vessel fitted with powerful derricks and cranes. These were required for the formidable task of lifting into the vessel her lower masts. The lower masts, unlike the top masts, top-gallants, and royals, which rose in tapering gradation above them, were part and parcel of a vessel's structure. They were not mere adjuncts. They were not detachable. They were not easily handled by a small gang of men. The top-gallant masts might be made of single trees. But the lower masts were as stoutly and solidly built as the keel itself. Seven pieces went to the making of each spar. Their inner sides were shaped like the jointed facets of a Chinese puzzle. Their outer sides were smooth and rounded. They were carefully bolted and dovetailed together, and girt about with iron hoops or woodings. A lower mast might measure more than six feet in circumference. It was specially fashioned at the lower end into the shape of a heel or tenon, and this was stepped in a clamp or mortise that rested on the keelson. At the uppermost end of a



lower mast was fitted the top-mast *cap*, a bulky bracelet of wood that wedded the top mast to the lower. Many feet below this came the *top*, properly so called, a commodious platform used for various purposes, to which fuller reference will be made on a later page.

The lower masts in all their massive bulk were supported by the standing rigging—the stays and the shrouds. The stays, double for fore and main, led forward. The shrouds, varying in number, led to either side of the ship. They were set up by blocks or “dead-eyes” to wooden platforms out-board of the bulwarks, where a man could stand to heave the lead. These platforms, known at one time as chain-wales, because they were fettered to the planking of the sides, were referred to in brief as chains. The shrouds were traversed horizontally by cross-ropes or ratlines, that formed a convenient ladder to the top.

When the *Victory* had received her lower masts and standing rigging she was free at last from dock-yard hands. She was, in fact, a living being, and began to have a separate existence. And now came her captain to take possession. Arriving at Chatham, he first visited the Admiral Superintendent of the Dockyard and paid his respects. From the admiral he received a narrow pendant, the heraldic achievement of his rank. Then he entered a boat and was rowed out to the ship. Causing his pendant at once to be hoisted, he took his stand upon the quarter-deck and, unfolding his papers, cleared his throat and read aloud his commission.

The audience who gathered round him and listened to the words of his induction were the standing officers. These persons, like the captain, were expressly appointed to the ship. They were not, however, his equals in any way, for a vessel can have

but one master. They were appointed not by commission but by warrant. They were warrant-officers. Their presence was essential to the completion of the vessel and her fitting and equipment for sea. They were the master, the gunner, the boatswain, the carpenter, the surgeon, and the purser. The captain made himself known to each in turn, shook hands, and said a few kindly words of greeting. Then, turning, he led the way and, followed by his retinue, commenced his first inspection of the vessel which it was his pride and privilege to command.

The *Victory* was a three-decker. This does not mean that she had three decks, and three decks only, but three decks specially prepared for the mounting and fighting of guns. The uppermost was known as the main deck, the second was known as the middle deck, and the third as the lower or gun deck. None of these decks presented a wide open space like a ballroom, or drill-shed, or place of assembly. The run of a deck was interrupted amidships by a series of impediments—the bodies of the stout-girthed, round-waisted masts; the fore, the main, and the after hatchways; capstans, shot-racks, and stanchions supporting the beams above. Rather it may be said that on every gun deck there were two long avenues. These, however, were roomy enough, and gave ample accommodation for the working of the guns.

Immediately below the lower deck was another deck, called the orlop. This deck differed from all above it in having no port-holes. In fact, as the deck itself was below the water-line it was impossible to pierce its sides even with a scuttle. Its gloomy recesses were lit by candles in horn lanterns hung from the beams. The orlop had a maximum height of five feet seven inches, so that many of its occupants had to stoop. But dark though it was, and

confined though it was, and stuffy from want of air, the orlop had two compensations: it was dry; and it was safe from the enemy's shot. Ladders led from it into the hold.

The lower deck and the middle deck were both completely roofed by the deck immediately above them. But with the main deck this was not the case. The foremost quarter of the main deck was covered by the forecastle, and the aftermost half was also covered. But from the main mast to the break of the forecastle the main deck was open to the sky.

The after portion of the main deck's roof, extending from the main mast to the stern of the ship, might appropriately have been called the half deck—if it had been clear of encumbrances. But over the after portion, from the mizzen mast to the taffrail, rose the poop, the highest pitched and most elevated position on board. Thus from the flagstaff, where the Navy's ensign fluttered over her stern, the *Victory* descended in wide sweeping wooden terraces: first the poop, then the quarter-deck, and then the waist or unroofed portion of the uppermost gun deck.

To reach the forecastle from the quarter-deck it was not necessary to descend to the main deck by one staircase and reascend by another. Narrow platforms called gangways bridged the chasm on either side of the ship.

After going the rounds of the ship, after examining every deck with a critical eye, after peering into every nook and every cranny, the captain returned to the quarter-deck. Here he dismissed his faithful myrmidons, who without a moment's loss of time dispersed to their respective quarters, each keenly intent on having his department ready in every essential at the earliest possible moment.

The master was primarily responsible, under the

captain, for the sailing of the ship. All that is comprehended in the word navigation was his province. It was his duty to conduct the *Victory* wherever the captain might direct; from Spithead to Plymouth, from China to Peru, or into the line of battle. The master was almost invariably a Younger Brother of the Trinity House. Educated, as a rule, at the Blue Coat School, he was trained by the Trinity, and underwent stiff examinations in such subjects as nautical astronomy and pilotage. By the aid of his charts and his leadline, he could feel his way up the English Channel in daylight or in dark. He could plot a course from Gibraltar to Martinique, prick it off on the chart, heave the log overboard to estimate the rate of sailing, keep one untiring eye on the sand-glass, the other on the direction and shifts of the wind, and from these indeterminate indications work out to a nicety the dead reckoning or distance run. In an unknown part of the limitless ocean he could determine longitude by his chronometer and latitude by his sextant, and so resolve his vessel's whereabouts. If he had not a chart he made one. And all his observations and calculations were in the log-book, recorded with neatness and precision. He had mates to assist him, called quartermasters. One of them always represented him under the break of the poop to direct the two seamen<sup>1</sup> at the wheel. The master's technical knowledge was amazing, even to the sailor-men. They made believe that he could not go ashore without an interpreter; for how would a dentist know what to do if he were told to haul away on the aftmost grinder aloft on the starboard quarter!

It might be thought, from the nature of his principal duties, that the presence of the master could have been dispensed with in the preliminaries

<sup>1</sup> In rough weather there were often enough four.

necessary before the *Victory* got to sea. But the master had secondary duties. If he was to be held responsible for the safe carriage of the ship, it was obviously for him to decide upon her trim, or, to use a land phrase, "deportment." In his province it lay to stow the hold, to select some three hundred and seventy tons of ballast, to see that it was clean, and to dispose it in the bottom of the ship;<sup>1</sup> to receive the four hundred tons of water, the hundred tons of fuel, and three hundred tons of provisions; to arrange and order the tanks and barrels and boxes and casks and tubs, and all such hamper, in such a manner that there should be no shifting when the vessel sailed; to distribute the weights evenly and balance them truly, so that the *Victory* should move on a steady keel and yet admit of supplies being withdrawn exactly as they were wanted with the minimum disturbance of equilibrium. These were arduous duties. They called for patient skill and the assistance of six or eight quartermasters.

The gunner was responsible for the armament of the ship. His first duties were to have the wooden gun-carriages slung on board and set in order along the gun decks, to procure the guns themselves from the arsenal and see them mounted on their carriages, to supply each gun with all its appurtenances and properties: rammers and sponges to load and clean, gun tackles to move the carriages forward, and breechings to stay their recoil. When the guns were all bestowed to his liking, the gunner turned

<sup>1</sup> Iron formed the best material for ballast. Shingle, being cheaper, was generally used with a due proportion of metal. Shingle by itself had a particularly awkward habit of shifting its position. Indeed, the larger stones occasionally drilled holes in the side of the ship. It was also very bulky and difficult to stow. Captains were therefore careful to insist on their proper ratio of iron.

his attention to the powder and shot. There were in all more than a hundred tons' weight of solid iron balls. Most of these found their way into the hold. But lest anything should be wanting when occasion arose, a certain number of them were placed near the guns and in racks round the coamings of the hatchways. Not too many: for being exposed they quickly grew rusty, and then had to be laboriously scraped before they would enter a gun. The shot-racks were merely thick wooden boards pierced with hemispherical hollows.

The powder was a much more important consideration, and constituted always an element of danger to the very existence of the ship. There were two magazines. Both were situated far below the water-line, in the very bowels of the ship. At this depth they were safe at least from the fire of the enemy. They were approached by their own companion ways covered by copper-covered hatches that were fastened down and locked. No one but the gunner was allowed to enter; and to make security doubly sure, the gunner himself was obliged to approach the captain in order to obtain the keys. The magazines were lined throughout with thick felt, and the gunner put on thick felt shoes whenever he entered. Light was admitted through an iron-barred scuttle that led into a little cabin or den which contained a guarded lantern, and was called the lighting-room. A reservoir and stop-cock allowed the entire chamber to be flooded in a sudden emergency. The after or hanging magazine was much the smaller. It contained a quantity of cartridges made up ready for immediate use. The fore magazine was the more important. It contained the bulk of the powder in strongly coopered casks.

But the gunner's headquarters in the *Victory* were in the armoury, or, as it was more usually called,

the gun-room. This sanctum of his was situated at the end of the lower gun deck, nearest to the stern. Here were kept all the small arms and small-arm ammunition. Here were muskets and pikes and blunderbusses and pistols and cutlasses and tomahawks: in lockers upon the floor, in stacks round the mizzen mast, in rows along the walls. It was one man's duty from morn till night to keep the weapons bright and clean. The gun-room's shape was defined by the stern and sides of the ship. A row of wooden partitions or bulkheads shut it off from the rest of the deck. The privacy of the place was therefore complete; but this, as we shall see on a later page, was not enjoyed by the gunner in undisputed possession.

The gunner had at his beck and call numerous subordinate and petty officers to assist him in his work. The quarter-gunners were each of them responsible for four of the great guns. The armourer had charge of the gun-room and the weapons it contained.

The bos'n was responsible for the motion of the ship and, what was equally important, for the repose of the ship. No man was busier than he when the *Victory* was fitting. He had to overhaul all the running rigging with its multiplicity of details, its ropes, its cordage, its tackles, its pulleys and blocks, halyards, sheets, braces, topping-lifts, buntlines, clew-garnets. He had to examine all the yards and see that they were ready to be hoisted into position and slung across the masts. He had to inspect all the canvas supplied and make sure that the sails were all in proper order and ready to be bent to the yards. He had charge of all the colours and flags, and of many other accessories too numerous to mention. It was his duty also to supervise the everyday work up aloft. No amount of sails and rigging could

benefit the *Victory* unless at a moment's notice canvas could be increased or shortened or taken in altogether. When the advice of the master had been converted into an order by the officer of the watch, the bos'n was responsible for reefing and furling. His whistle, the badge of his authority, would pipe all hands on deck or make his directions clearly understood, even amid the shrieking of the gale. He knew who should be made captain of the foretop, and who could best be trusted at the yardarm in a three-reefed-topsail breeze.

At least as heavy a burden to the bos'n as the sails and spars and rigging was the "ground-tackle." The *Victory* had several anchors, but three at least—the small bower, the best bower, and the sheet anchor—had always to be in working order. They were stowed by the bos'n and his mates upon the port and starboard bows of the ship ready to be dropped at a moment's emergency. The forecastle was the bos'n's peculiar demesne. From either side of it projected over the sea massive beams, called "catheads" because of the carvings which embellished them. These were fitted with specially strong pulleys for raising the anchor from the sea without injury to the sides of the ship. The anchor was fitted with a large round ring which could be easily hooked and drawn up to the cathead by the cat-tackle before the anchor was fished or tucked into its bed.

To the ring of the anchor the cable was attached. The cable perhaps gave the bos'n more anxiety than anything under his charge. It was like an overgrown child. It was delicate. It was always getting into difficulties and calling for help. You must understand that it was made of hempen rope. Now, a hempen rope capable of holding such a ship as the *Victory*, and stoutly withstanding all her plunges, all her twistings, all her strains, and all her stresses,



was of itself almost unmanageable. An iron chain would have been docile in comparison. But conceive a hawser twenty-five inches round the waist! It was as if the great dragon of the deep had come aboard every time the anchor was raised. A ship of the line did not look to anchor in water much deeper than forty fathoms (240 feet). But she rode more easily on a loose rein—that is, with double the length of cable that the depth of the anchorage demanded. It would not do for the *Victory* to be immediately over her ground-tackle, for the strain might prove a breaking one. A cable was therefore one hundred fathoms long, and the safe stowage of so bulky a piece of furniture was a matter of no mean difficulty. The cable tier consumed a large part of the orlop, or a large part of the hold. Nor were the bos'n's anxieties at an end when the cable was brought home and snugly berthed. Wet through and through by its immersion, it tended to rot as it lay in the tier. And this was very serious. Not only because the *Victory's* cables cost £400 apiece, and the bos'n was held to blame for all mishaps to them; but because the life of the *Victory* and the lives of all on board depended on their soundness and security.

When a ship was at anchor, the end of the cable was twisted and twined round the riding bitts. These bitts or bollards were in shape like a giant's towel-rail. They were massive in strength, and built into the very framework of the ship. They were situated on the forepart of the gun deck facing the hawse-holes through which the cables passed. When the anchor was weighed, the cable was hove in by means of the "messenger," an endless rope which led round vertical rollers near the hawse-holes. The capstan would be manned on the decks above. Capstan-bars were thrust, like the spokes of a wheel, into the square holes of the drum-head, the bars

were manned, and with many a "Yo-heave-ho!" and "Heave and pawl!" round went the barrel of the capstan as it set the messenger revolving. The cable meanwhile was secured to the messenger by short lengths of soft rope, called "nippers," and as it moved slowly aft for descent to its place of stowage in the tier below, the nippers were cast off and fresh ones clapped on further forward by the ship's boys. These youngsters, in consequence, especially when they were smart, purloined the name of the rope they used and came to be known as Nippers. When the anchor was dropped, the cable ran over the bitts and through the hawse-hole so quickly that there was a risk that the friction might cause the wood to ignite. To prevent this from happening, seamen were stationed at the points of danger with buckets of water in their hands.

The hawse-holes were a constant source of trouble to the bos'n. When a ship got to sea he stopped them with plugs. But the level of the gun deck was so near the sea-level<sup>1</sup> that it was quite impossible in heavy weather to keep the water out. To prevent it from swishing and swilling along the deck and making human life unendurable, a barricade was erected across the bows. This fence was known as the manger because it fulfilled a secondary purpose and was used as a cattle pen.

The bos'n had his quarters, his cabin and his storeroom, in the forward part of the orlop. He had several mates to help him with his duties. But his chief petty officers were the sail-maker and the rope-maker, who were always busily employed.

The carpenter was responsible to the captain for the fabric of the ship. Before he could obtain the warrant of his office, he had to prove that he had himself a working knowledge of all that a carpenter

<sup>1</sup> In the *Victory* three feet eleven inches. Cp. p. 30.

might be called upon to do. He was, perhaps more than anyone else on board, the man for emergencies. He had, of course, much work to do before the *Victory* left harbour. He had to examine all her timbers, her ribs, her beams, and her knees. If any part were rotten he had to remedy the deficiency. For this part of his labours an intimate knowledge of shipbuilding was requisite. Then he had to examine all the caulking of the seams and inspect the spare yards and top masts. The boats, too, were his peculiar care. But it was the storm and the battle that tried him. He could save the ship when no one else on board could do anything. He could carry her into port under jury rig when all her masts had gone by the board. He could repair the damage done by the enemy in a fashion little short of miraculous. He always knew exactly how much water there was in the hold, and sometimes was obliged to counsel the captain to order all hands to the pumps. Then there was always something that called for repair, some spar to be fished, some paint-work to be renewed, some bulkhead or locker renovated. The carpenter's services were in constant requisition, and were held in high estimation. His chief assistants were the caulker and the blacksmith, both specialists after their kind. He himself had his cabin and stores by the bos'n's in the forward part of the orlop.

The surgeon was responsible for the health of the ship. Before he could obtain his warrant he had to undergo a thorough medical training both as physician and as surgeon. The narrow limits of the *Victory*, the swarms of men who inhabited her decks, the difficulty of obtaining fresh food and water while afloat, the enforced battening down of hatches and caulking of port-lids in rough weather, the herding together of frail and healthy in narrow cribs and cabined spaces, the difficulty of conducting fresh

air to the lower decks—all these, and many other causes, filled the surgeon's hands very full. When the captain went his rounds, the surgeon invariably accompanied him, and called his attention to conditions which his experience told him were prejudicial to health. He was a stickler for the closest observance of all the laws of cleanliness and hygiene. He would persuade the captain, when need arose, to wash the entire ship with vinegar and the entire ship's company with soap and water. He had power to fumigate the lower decks with burning sulphur, to issue more palatable rations to the sickly, and to have this man or that excused from duty on the score of ill-health. The principal disease he had to treat was scurvy, and his most frequent remedy was lime-juice. His hospital or sick-bay was situated on the main deck, and was roofed in by the forecastle above. Here he was aided in his duties by two assistant-surgeons and numerous attendants called "loblolly-boys."

The purser was an officer appointed by the Lords of the Admiralty to take charge of the provisions of the ship. He was almost invariably a man of means and a person of wealth. In order to obtain his warrant he had to find sureties for considerable sums. Much was entrusted to his keeping, and much that was easily disposed of and turned into money. He had under his immediate care all the cotton, flannel, and linen required for the clothing of the entire ship's company. He had charge of all the food—the beef and pork, the butter and cheese, the flour, the sugar, the treacle, the cocoa and oatmeal. He had charge of all the spirits—the rum, the brandy, and grog. He was a chandler and wine-merchant in a large way of business. He was a wholesale tailor and provision merchant. It was within his power to make a mint of money, and the Admiralty in consequence extorted in advance large sums which they could appropriate

if the purser proved guilty of defalcations. This was a bad principle. It was antagonistic to the good old English belief that a man is innocent till he is proved guilty.

But though branded, as it were, without reason, it was not this that made the purser the most unpopular officer on board. The food that was carried by a man-of-war was poor in quality, and the men objected to it vehemently. It was not the purser's fault that the butter was rancid or the pork unduly salt, but it was he who issued the rations. Then again, whenever a seaman was invalided, the time spent in sick-bay was not reckoned as part of his service, but simply as time lost. This was an Admiralty regulation which was never for any cause relaxed. The purser was in no sense responsible. But it was he who made the deductions from the unhappy seaman's pay-sheet.

There were other odious duties which he was called on to perform. The more efficiently he carried them out, the more thoroughly was he disliked. In reality he was a person more deserving of pity than of hate. He was as capable in his way as the master. He was as efficient in his work as the bos'n. He was a thoroughly sound business man, and gave his advice to all who sought it. It would be easy to quote examples to show how the purser, though exempted by the nature of his office, often bore a brave share in the heat of battle, or did what he could to solace and assist the wounded. But the seamen could not conquer their repulsion for him. They regarded him as an unmitigated scoundrel and a pitiless extortioner.<sup>1</sup> "Old Nipcheese" was the

<sup>1</sup> When the reforms of the nineteenth century removed many of the seamen's grounds of complaint about food and pay, the purser obtained leave to change his name. He is known to-day as the paymaster.

kindest of the epithets which they heaped ungenerously upon him

The purser, like the master and the surgeon, messed with the executive officers. But his headquarters were situated at the aftermost end of the orlop, immediately under the gun-room. His cabin was one of the most commodious in the ship. His storeroom breathed forth upon the air a mingled smell of biscuits and cocoa that was not altogether wanting in fragrance.

From the mere narration of their duties it will be seen how large a part the warrant or standing officers took in preparing the *Victory* for sea. Their method of procedure was similar. In the privacy of their respective sanctums they compiled lists of all their requirements, and took these lists to the captain for his signature. When this had been affixed, they went ashore and resorted to the various provinces of the dockyard—the anchor-walk, the rope-walk, the rigging-loft, and the victualling establishment. Every list was overhauled by the Admiral Superintendent, who would part with nothing, not the smallest adjunct, unless the proper routine was observed in its minutest particular. The first articles brought on board were hammocks for the standing officers and their assistants, food and drink sufficient for their needs, and boats to enable them to visit the yard and bring off the necessary stores.

No one on board the *Victory* in these early days had more calls made upon his time than the captain. The laws of the service not only demanded his presence afloat but positively forbade him on any excuse whatsoever even to think of sleeping ashore. His dining-saloon or fore cabin, his sleeping cabin and state-room were immediately under the poop. They were separated from the quarter-deck by bulk-

heads. The state-room was roomy and commodious, stretching from side to side of the ship, and having a row of windows in the stern and a gallery outside them which enabled him undisturbed to take the air. Without the furniture which the captain brought from home, however, its appointments were meagre to the last degree: a table and chairs, of course; a rack for sword and telescope and pistols; a locker under the sternlights for portable property; but little more. The window curtains gave a note of colour and the carpet an appearance of homely comfort. Along the top of the lockers ran a leather mattress, on which the captain could recline and take his ease with a book if he happened to have one. But there was little enough time for anything but work. The warrant-officers, dockyard officials, and other visitors were in and out of the state-room from morning till night. And in between times the captain had to direct his energies to devising expedients for what, after all, was his most important business—the manning of the ship.

As in twos and threes the men came on board, and as in tens and twenties they multiplied, the warrant-officers divided them among the various departments and set them to work in gangs under petty officers. Some became sail-makers, and with thimble and palm sewed away at bags and fire-screens, at drawbuckets and cabin partitions. Some became carpenters, and with chisel and saw and hammer and plane made and fitted capstan-bars and mess tables, or put the finishing touches to the more ornamental portions of the upper deck. Some became painters, and numbered the hammocks or varnished the boats and oars. Some became rope-makers, and manufactured spun-yarn and nettle-stuff. Some became armourer's assistants, and made metal plates and eyes and eyelet-holes for hammocks. Some



became riggers, and stropped the blocks, reeved ropes, or turned in dead-eyes. All were kept active. The *Victory*, which a few weeks previously had been devoid of all but a nucleus crew, was now as busy as a hive. To the eye of an unpractised observer hundreds of men may have appeared to run this way and that, climbing up ropes only to descend again, disappearing down hatchways one moment to re-emerge the next, running into one another, tumbling over one another, bustling, hurrying, confusing one another, and getting into one another's way. In reality each had his assorted task, and though none of the workers may have known what his fellow was attempting or how he was spending his time, yet the *Victory*, a world in itself, in this respect did but resemble the wider world outside. Labour was organized, and order evolved from chaos, as quickly and efficiently as in an overturned ants' nest.

When the last of the rigging had been set up, when the end of the last rope had been pointed, when the last gun had been hoisted on board, when the last handspike had been put in its place, then the decks were sanded, tarpaulins were thrown over the painted work, and all hands were called to black the rigging. Stays were blacked, and backstays, yards and shrouds, and ratlines. The best Stockholm tar was used to render them waterproof. Things liable to rust were also blacked. And when the turn of the guns came, the tar was put on thinly under a warm sun, and the guns were afterwards polished with a well-oiled cloth. While the tar on the standing rigging dried, the last of the provisions were brought and checked and the drinking-water stowed in the tanks. The master and gunner, the bos'n and purser, paid their last visit to the dockyard, and approaching the captain, informed him that all had been brought on board. The running rigging was then rove, the



sails bent to the yards, and the "Blue Peter" hoisted in order to show that the *Victory* was ready for sea.

It remained to welcome the admiral. His accommodation, immediately under the captain's, which it resembled in almost every particular, was swept and garnished. The captain, attended by his retinue, took a last look round. The sweepers removed the last speck of dust. The midshipmen smartened themselves up. The marines stood at attention on the poop. The great moment arrived. The officer of the watch approached the captain and gravely saluted. "Admiral's barge coming alongside, sir," he reported. The captain fingered his sword and returned the salute. Down came the narrow pennant. The bos'n, lifting the whistle to his mouth, piped the side. The marines presented arms. There was a ruffle of drums. The ship's band played "Rule Britannia!" Every head was uncovered. The admiral's flag was hoisted to the mast-head, and the *Victory* submitted herself into the hands of her suzerain.

## CHAPTER V

### OLD AND NEW

*The "Argo," stellified because 'twas rare,  
With this ship's long-boat scarcely might compare.  
Her main sail, if I do not much mistake,  
For Amphitrite might a kirtle make.*—HEXWOOD.

WHEN the keel of a modern man-of-war is laid or the most up-to-date battleship is launched, it is not unusual with modern boasters to compare the dimensions of the latest leviathan with those of the *Victory*. This process, which has little or nothing to recommend it, tends to throw the most famous vessel afloat into the false viewpoint of an ever-diminishing perspective. No proper or profitable comparison can be instituted between the *Victory* and an up-to-date battleship. The total weight of the *Victory's* broadside—that is to say, the total weight of all the projectiles that the *Victory* was able to fire in one given direction at the same time—turned the scale at eleven hundred and sixty pounds. To-day, a capital ship can discharge a projectile of two thousand pounds from a single sixteen-inch gun. No one dreams of comparing a Zeppelin airship with the kite that Nelson flew as a boy. No one dreams of comparing a Canadian Pacific locomotive engine with the four-horse diligence that conveyed Nelson to Chatham when first he went to sea. The futility of such comparisons is obvious to the meanest intelligence. And equally futile is a comparison between H.M.S. *Rodney* (33,900 tons)

and the vessel which bore Nelson's flag at the battle of Trafalgar.

There have been three epochs of naval warfare, the epoch when battleships were propelled by oars, the epoch when battleships were propelled by sails, and the epoch of steam-driven ironclads. The first epoch ended at Lepanto in 1571 and the second at Trafalgar in 1805. The third is still with us; though there are those who say that the age of steam-driven ironclads ended with Lord Jellicoe's victory over the Germans at Jutland, and that the naval warfare of the future will be conducted with submarines and aeroplane-carriers.

For the true appreciation of warships it is important at least to keep the epochs distinct. The proper standard by which to judge the galley with which Don John defeated the Turks is the galley which won the great sea victory of Salamis. The proper standard of comparison for the *Nelson* of 1929 is our earliest of ironclads, the *Warrior*.

What then is the proper standard of comparison for Nelson's *Victory*?<sup>1</sup> Not the ship of Lord Jellicoe or the ship of Themistocles, but the first *Victory* that figured on the British Navy list, the vessel that bore the flag of old John Hawkins when with Howard and Drake, in 1588, he smashed the "Invincible" Armada.

The first *Victory* was added to the Navy in 1560. She was bought for the Crown from Master Anthony Hickman and Master Edward Castlyn, merchants, both of the city of London. At the time of her purchase she was known as the *Great Christopher*, but this name was abandoned in favour of *Victory*, by the order of Queen Elizabeth. The name had

<sup>1</sup> Comparisons flattering to the *Victory*—as that she has a deck area equal to that of the *Lord Nelson* (1906)—are generally suppressed.

never been used before, and may possibly have been suggested by Magellan's *Victoria*, the first vessel to circumnavigate the globe. More probably it was the choice of the queen herself. *Dreadnought*, we know, and *Swiftsure* were names of her devising. So why not *Victory*?

Elizabeth's *Victory* was ninety-five feet long and thirty-five feet broad. These figures are not perhaps very suggestive by themselves. They become more significant when we grasp something of the ratio understood to exist between the length of a ship and her breadth. The sailing merchantman of the Middle Ages was little more than twice as long as she was broad. She was sometimes called in mockery a round ship. The galleys, on the other hand, that fought at Lepanto were "long ships," in a literal sense. For the length of their keels was nothing less than five times the measure of their beam.

The round ship of the Middle Ages—let us call her at once a carrack—was far too much of a rolling tub ever to develop into a fighting machine. The galley had things all her own way. But the English in Tudor times changed the destiny of the world by evolving a warship superior to any that had ever been launched before. They gave their new vessel the sails of the carrack and much of the length of the galley as well. Now the galley mounted guns on a forward platform, having no other available space. But the new vessel, unencumbered by oars, mounted guns all the way along both of her sides, and by so doing increased the number of her weapons in a leap from five to fifty.

Superiority of gun-fire gave the new ship her strength. But it was increase of length in proportion to breadth that, making her weatherly, made her also supreme. The perfect ratio between length

and breadth was not arrived at without years of experiment. Old John Hawkins, the greatest authority on ship construction of the Elizabethan age, put the figures finally at three and one—three for the length and one for the breadth. On this pattern the *Revenge* was constructed, the *Revenge* that carried Drake's flag against the Armada and died with Sir Richard Grenville at Flores. Just as the *Dreadnought* of 1906 has given her name to the prevailing type of to-day, so the *Revenge* gave her name to the most highly developed Tudor type, the type that defeated the Spanish carracks in 1588. Now the *Revenge* was not built until 1577, and the *Victory* was purchased second-hand some seventeen years before. It was only to be expected that the older ship should approximate to older fashions. The *Victory* was not as cumbersome an old sea-wagon as the *Henri Grâce à Dieu* of King Hal. But she had not the fine lines of the latest battleships that fought against Medina Sidonia. Her length, in fact, was ten feet too short.<sup>1</sup>

Multiplying length by breadth, the product by depth in hold, and dividing the result by one hundred, John Hawkins reckoned his *Victory's* burden as 560 tons.<sup>2</sup> The Spaniards with their own method of estimating tonnage would have called her a vessel of 760 tons net and over 900 tons gross; which should prove conclusively that the Armageddon of 1588 was not a battle of giants and dwarfs, as it is so often represented. By any system of reckoning the *Victory* was much larger than the *Revenge*; and, the proportions of the *Revenge* being considered perfect, the *Victory* was condemned as too large, and was seldom used except in an emergency. This

<sup>1</sup> The beam of the *Revenge* was thirty-two feet and her length a hundred feet.

<sup>2</sup> Gross tonnage perhaps 740 tons.

does not mean that Elizabeth's admirals preferred ships that were small to ships that were large. It means that the shipbuilders of that day could not build a vessel of the English keel-length much larger than the hull of the *Revenge*.

The *Victory* of old John Hawkins had three masts and a long tapering bowsprit with great steeve. On this she set a square sail called the spritsail, though she used it only when sailing free; that is, running before the wind. On the fore mast she set a great swell of canvas, which was composed of three parts: the course or body of the sail—a word corrupted from *corps*; the bonnet, which was laced to the foot of the course; and the drabber, which was laced to the foot of the bonnet. If the wind rose, the drabber was unloosed and stowed away in the locker. If the wind increased to a gale, the bonnet was "shaken off," and the course was lowered on the mast. In fair weather a rather absurd little topsail, very short in the hoist and wide at the foot, was set on an equally absurd little topmast. The main mast had a "triple expansion" of canvas, even larger than that of the fore mast, and a topsail of rather more generous proportions. The aftmost mast had a sail unlike the others. It was not square but triangular. It was not set athwartships but, like the sail of a xebec or Arab dhow, fore and aft, or along the middle line. This cut of sail was considered very effectual in the assistance it rendered to the rudder. From its position amidships it derived a name which it gave to the *mizzen* mast. It was sheeted to an "outlicker" that jutted over the stern as the bowsprit over the bows.

The *Victory* of old John Hawkins had six sails and six sails only. With these, when the wind was behind her, she sailed in a manner that would have done credit enough to a vessel of Nelson's day. She

did not, however, do herself equal justice when the wind came sideways or on her beam. She required that the angle made by the line of the wind's direction and the line of her advance should be no less than ninety degrees, a figure that is disappointing when compared with the forty-five of modern racing craft. But then on her forecastle and quarter-deck she piled up structure and superstructure. And a top-gallant poop, however fearsome to the enemy, drove her steadily to leeward of her course. The "waist" was an appropriate enough name in those days. Its nearness to the water-line tempted the enemy to board or, as Hawkins said, "to effect an entry." If they came he was ready for them. The sides of his decks overlooking the waist were barricaded with cubbridge heads and loop-holed for musketry.

At the time of the Armada the *Victory* mounted forty-two guns. These differed considerably one from another, and some were very small. "Murderers" they were called—mere blunderbusses mounted in order to be ready for boarders. But the primary armament probably numbered thirty-five big guns, and the majority of these frowned through square gun-ports on a single ordnance deck.

The complement of the *Victory* numbered four hundred men, though at the time of her greatest conflict she had four hundred and thirty on board.

One of Philip II's correspondents, a secret service official, whose information could be trusted, wrote to his master that the men in the English ships were "poor creatures." It may have been this very message that induced the Spanish king to send his old-fashioned, obsolete vessels to fight with the latest *Revenge*s. What the Spanish informer meant is this: "Our ships are crowded with the smartest soldiers, clad in backs and breasts, thigh-pieces and morions.

These English vessels are full of ill-kempt wretches, stained with the weather and reeking of tar." In a sense the informer was quite correct. Of the *Victory's* four hundred men, only one-quarter were soldiers. The rest were seamen all. But which is the better—to teach your soldiers seamanship or teach your sailors to fight? This question had not found its right answer in England in the time of Henry VIII, for of the 660 men that formed the *Henri Grâce à Dieu's* complement, no less than 400 men were soldiers.

In Spain, at the time when the *Victory* fought her greatest fight, the question had not even been asked. And so came the ghastly tale of wrecks from Cape Wrath to Bloody Foreland.

The *Victory* of old John Hawkins was a picture when she sailed the sea. Not the Doge of Venice's state-barge can have glowed with such rainbow glory. Each sail was a feast for the eye. Each sail bore the semblances of gods and men, tritons and nereids. The hull was blazoned with heraldic colours, vermillion, azure, green, silver, and purple. The stern was a gallery of plastic art with "divers devices and beastes." From aloft streamed banners and bannerets and pennons.

Exactly two hundred years elapsed between the acquisition of the first *Victory* and the acquisition of the last. During this period considerable progress was made in the art of building ships. It must be admitted that most of the improvements were arrived at not in England but in France. So unenterprising were British shipbuilders in the middle of the eighteenth century, that an admiral of King George declared in jest that his country made her ships by the mile and cut off a piece when required. But he and his fellow-admirals made up for the indifference of British shipwrights and want of initiative in



British dockyards. For they fought the French, and capturing prizes, brought them home to serve as models. Thus it came about that when the most famous ship of all was built, there was nothing lacking to make her pre-eminent in symmetry and size.

In examining her figures the reader must remember that so long as the material used was wood, a battleship's growth, even through the centuries, could not proceed otherwise than very slowly. For all parts of her structure were necessarily proportional to her keel. And the most iron-hearted oak that ever grew lost its rigid qualities when extended piece by piece to an undue length. The first *Victory* was 95 feet long and 35 feet broad. The last *Victory* (measured along the keel) was 151 feet long. Measured along the gun deck she was 186 feet. Her beam measured 52 feet. The first *Victory* had a burden of 560 tons. The last *Victory's* burden was very nearly four times as great—2,162.<sup>1</sup> These figures speak for themselves.

But it is when we come to examine motive-power and armament that the contrast between the two vessels becomes really marked and impressive.

The first *Victory* had six sails. The last had thirty-one! She still set a spritsail on her bowsprit. She still set a great fore-and-aft sail upon her mizzen. She still used the word course to describe the sails that were nearest to the deck on fore mast and main. But here the resemblance to her ancestress ended. Above the fore course rose the fore topsail. This was no longer a mere appendage. The fore course in area was more than 3,000 square feet. The fore topsail was more than 3,500 square feet. Above the

<sup>1</sup> Gross tonnage, 3,400. The *Dreadnought* of 1906 had not quite twice the displacement of the first British ironclad, the *Warrior*; and even the *Nelson* of 1929 has still much less than four times her displacement.

fore topsail rose the fore top-gallant, and above that again the royal. Similar sails were set upon the main mast; but, each for each, they were bigger. The main topsail, the largest spread of canvas in the ship, measured 60 feet on either side, 55 feet along the head, and 90 feet along the foot. The main yard was 110 feet long. The mizzen mast, above its fore-and-aft sail, set canvas like the fore mast and main. In addition to these and other square sails, the *Victory* had at least a dozen that were triangular in shape. They were known to sailors as staysails, being set on the stays that supported the masts. Then there were stunsails, studding or steering sails. These were not included in the thirty-one. They were fair-weather sails, devices for extending the breadth of square sails when the wind was light. They were set on booms rigged out for the purpose through iron rings at the extremities of the yardarms.

There were no longer such things as bonnets and drabblers. The area of canvas spread to the wind could be regulated more nicely by means of reefs. The seamen raced aloft, lay along the yard, pounded the canvas with their hands and, gathering it up, tied it over the yard by soft ropes worked at regular intervals into the surface of the sail. When occasion arose, the *Victory* could lie up to the wind two points nearer than John Hawkins's ship, and that despite her size.

At Trafalgar she went into battle with all her sails set and with studding-sails aloft and alow. In a most noble manner she must have moved, piling her cloudy towers of rounded canvas snow-white against heaven's blue, throwing aside the water with the contemptuous curve of her prow, and leaning grandly over across the bosom of the sea.

John Hawkins's ship mounted her ordnance on a single deck devoted to gunnery purposes. Nelson's

ship, as we have already seen, had no less than three of these decks. John Hawkins's *Victory* had thirty-six guns. Nelson's *Victory* had a hundred. On each of her gun decks she had thirty guns, and on her upper deck she had an additional ten. This grand armament gave her an overwhelming strength. If she had encountered five of Hawkins's ships, she could have fought the lot of them without danger to herself; nay, even without so much as hazard. If Hawkins's *Victory* had sighted Nelson's *Victory* there could have been only one thing for her to do. There was no use in trusting to friends for deliverance. Her only plan would have been to turn at once and fly before the wind. For in sailing free, and in that alone, the earliest *Victory*, it will be remembered, had little she could have learned from the last.

The first *Victory* in all cost £3,500. The last, when equipped and ready for sea, cost over £100,000.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LIFE OF THE SHIP

'Twas folly trying  
To read i' th' "Berth"—for what with shying  
Hats about—and playing flutes,  
Backgammon—Boxing—Cleaning boots,  
And other such polite pursuits,  
Skylarking—Eating—Singing—Swigging,  
And Arguments about the Rigging,  
"This mast, how taut!"—"That sail, how square!"  
All study had been fruitless there. ALFRED BURTON.

AS soon as she put to sea, and so long as she remained at sea, in storm and in calm, through months of peace and hours of battle, the *Victory* served as a training establishment for the leaders of the next generation. At Trafalgar the junior officers serving on board were thirty-one in number. There were seldom less than twenty-four at any time.

These young fellows joined the *Victory* not many hours before she weighed anchor. Some of them were transferred from other ships. Some came from the Royal Naval College at Portsmouth, the forerunner of the *Britannia* and *Hindustan*, and the colleges at Osborne and Dartmouth. Others came at the bidding or invitation of the captain. The captain was allowed to take to sea four servants for every hundred of his company, and as the *Victory* carried nine hundred men, the captain could claim a retinue of thirty-six. Out of this number he had to furnish himself with a coxswain and barge's crew. But when these had been provided there were still

vacancies to be filled, and he summoned the sons of his old friends or his younger cousins and nephews to go to sea and learn to serve their king. In this manner Nelson and Collingwood joined their first ships a few years after the *Victory* was finished. In this manner the great Lord Hood went to sea some twenty years before her keel was laid down. All alike figured on the books as "servants." But none, of course, at any time had any menial duties.

There were no precise regulations governing the age at which a "captain's servant" joined the Navy. It was the exception for a boy to leave home before he was eight years of age. But it is quite certain that many went to sea before they were ten. On the other hand, young officers who had not yet received a commission, and were transferred to the *Victory* from other ships, might have been serving for years and years. There was no equitable system of promotion as there is in the service to-day. The ages of the juniors might, therefore, range from eight to thirty or thirty-five. There are even cases reported of midshipmen over the age of forty.

The more juvenile members of this family would to-day be known as cadets. On board the *Victory* they were properly styled "volunteers," but by their elders were more often referred to as "youngsters." They were not considered old enough to look after themselves, and were confided to the tender ministrations of the gunner. The gunner provided for their wants, saw that they were not bullied, spoke to them on occasion like a father, sent their linen to be washed and their boots to be mended, yarned to them of old sea fights, and taught them to box the compass and know the ropes. Their habitat thus became the gun-room, with its stacks of half-pikes and rows of muskets. The tops of the lockers which contained the pistols were covered

with cushions that offered a comfortable couch. Overhead, between the beams, were other lockers, in which the youngsters might stow their treasured belongings, the parting presents they brought from home, unanswered letters, and a lanyard or two. Further cupboards on either side of the stern ports accommodated sextants and telescopes, books and almanacs. From a rod that ran across the top of the room a lamp depended. And over all was the tiller. Leading from the rudder outboard of the ship, and actuated by leather straps that twined round the drum of the steering-wheel on the upper deck, this beam moved ever forwards and back like the frame of a giant's loom. An awkward stern-post knee ran across the floor to trip the unwary novice.

The young gentlemen who had reached the mature age of fifteen were entitled to call themselves midshipmen. Officers of this exalted rank were free from leading-strings, and heartily despised or munificently patronized the kiddies of the gun-room. Themselves, they messed aft of the orlop in the midshipmen's berth or tier. This *sanctum sanctorum* they regarded as the very hub of the ship. And in this opinion they received some support from the famous Sir Robert Calder. When captain of the *Victory* he always used to take important visitors to the midshipmen's berth, and introduce them to it in the following words: "This is the place where all the admirals and captains in the service are tried from day to day, and where no one, however exalted his rank, escapes being hauled over the coals."

The "berth," it must be clearly understood, was neither luxurious nor palatial. It was not a separate part of the ship. It was simply a temporary structure made of canvas screens and sea-chests. The screens gave a semblance of privacy, and the sea-chests made a rampart and provided seats. The entire space at

the disposal of its occupants may have measured some six or eight feet square. The beams above bore rows of hooks, and these served to support quadrant cases, cocked hats, dirks, and belts. Sundry holes, which would certainly have escaped the notice of the occasional visitor, formed hiding-places for pipes and other gear. James Anthony Gardner, a distinguished officer who served on board the *Victory*, and who lived to be a commander and to write his reminiscences, thus describes the "hub" of the ship and the Star Chamber for admirals:—

"Our mess-place had canvas screens scrubbed white, wainscot tables well polished, Windsor chairs, and a pantry fitted in the wing<sup>1</sup> to stow our crockery and dinner traps with safety. The holystones and hand-organs,<sup>2</sup> in requisition twice a week, made our orlop deck as white as the boards of any crack drawing-room, the strictest attention being paid to cleanliness; and everything had the appearance of Spartan simplicity. We used to sit down to a piece of salt beef, with sourkrout, and dine gloriously with our pint of blackstrap<sup>3</sup> after; ready at all calls, and as fit for battle as for muster."

The berth included, besides its midshipmen, the captain's clerk, the purser's clerk, and the assistant surgeons. Their presence did not tend to decrease the existing disparity of age between the oldest present and the youngest. Another nautical writer, looking back in later life at his introduction to the service, presents rather forcibly the contrasts of the berth in this particular.

"The dark cavern which formed the mess berth, where a ray of daylight never entered, seemed rather horrible to my imagination, and the motley group of

<sup>1</sup> Part of the orlop nearest to the sides of the ship.

<sup>2</sup> Small holystones.

<sup>3</sup> Spanish red wine.

all ages from ten to twenty-five that filled it did not inspire me with much confidence. At the door stood a stout negro, scarcely visible, except for his white teeth and his rolling eyes. . . . A little sprig of a midshipman was venting imprecations on him for not having dinner ready. Surrounding a table inside the berth, which was illumined by two dwarf candles, that appeared as if they had never reached their proper growth, sat eight or ten small officers employed in various ways. One was playing a difficult piece of music on the flute, with the notes placed before him, propped up by a great quart bottle. A companion, to annoy and ridicule him, had put his pocket comb between two pieces of paper, and applying it to his mouth, produced a sound more execrable than the bagpipes, yet still endeavouring to imitate the tune. Two youths in the farthest corner had quarrelled, and were settling their dispute in a boxing match. Another seemed totally distracted from the scene, and leaning his elbows on the table, was contemplating the miniature of a fair-haired girl, whose mild blue eyes beamed with love and constancy. On the opposite side of the table, two youngsters, with a treatise on seamanship before them, were arguing in no very gentle terms on their proficiency in naval tactics. At the head of the table an old master's-mate was exercising his authority in preserving peace; but as he was engaged at the same time in mixing a good stiff glass of grog, his orders were either disregarded or laughed at."

There may have been lack of space in the berth, there may have been deficiency of wholesome food, but at least there was always a fine superfluity of noise. Argument was incessant, and debates were conducted in the most vociferous manner. Those who had a mind to sing did not wait for a pause in



the conversation. And the clamour was aggravated by the angry expostulations of those who were interrupted in their enjoyment of a game of cards or backgammon by an avalanche of beer down their necks.

One topic of perennial interest with the seniors was the possibility of promotion. Every midshipman longed for the time when he should earn his commission. Not till then could he exchange his hanger for a sword. Not till then could he wear his hat athwartships instead of fore and aft. Not till then could he escape from the midshipmen's berth to the more seemly decorum of the ward-room. Not till then, whatever his age might be, could he count himself a man.

Every "young gentleman," therefore, devoted himself with more or less keenness to the pursuit of professional knowledge. There were certain things that had to be done. All midshipmen were expected to keep a journal of the cruise, and their day's work went to the captain for inspection. In harbour they took charge of the boats. At night they mustered the watch. At quarters they mustered the guns' crews. At noon they attended the master on the quarter-deck and took the altitude of the sun. With varying degrees of accuracy they worked out the ship's position by dead reckoning. They qualified as able seamen by reefing and furling the main topsail, heaving the lead, and taking their trick at the wheel. They used to pull an oar from time to time, and listen attentively to the bos'n's instructions as he taught them to knot and splice.

Some midshipmen grew tired of waiting for promotion and qualified as master's-mate. This status entitled them to considerable increase of pay, and pay to a poor man often meant everything. But the rank of master's-mate, unlike the rank of sub-

lieutenant to-day, carried with it no succession rights to a lieutenancy. There was a recognized distinction between the "mate" with his professional knowledge and the petty officer, or master's assistant. But the proper line of progress was from master's-mate to master, and, therefore, the exercise of patience was commendable in those who wished to rise above a warrant.

However hard a midshipman might toil, his labours bore the same relation to his life's work as those of a university student. At their best they were a little out of touch with reality. A reefer, like an undergraduate, might slave from early morn to dewy eve; he might accomplish as much or more than a full-blown lieutenant. But for all that he was a student. He was not professed; he was a novice. He was not independent; he was under tutelage. His position was not authoritative. And therefore, like his fellow-students all the world over, he liked to accentuate his irresponsibility. He loved mad romps and wild escapades. Skylarking was as the breath of life to him. Ragging alone made existence tolerable. His spirits were ever bubbling. His pranks were boyish. He was irrepressible.

When dinner was served in the ward-room; when the lieutenants, the captain of marines, the master, the purser, the surgeon, and the chaplain sat round their table enjoying perhaps a brace of roast fowl, and dallying over their wine, then was the joyous time for midshipmen. The first lieutenant was their ogre and their bugbear. He was like a dean or proctor. He set down on the tablets of his memory all the sins of a midshipman, all his shortcomings and deficiencies. But the first lieutenant was president of the officers' mess. And the ward-room was situated aft of the middle deck, immediately under the admiral's cabin, and immediately over the gun-

room. In other words, it was well removed from the upper deck and the orlop. The midshipmen did not linger over their meal. There was little reason perhaps for doing so. Salt junk, lobscouse, dog's body, sea pie, pea coffee, hurry-hush, and chowder were the standing dishes. By these you are to understand various messes and hashes made up in equal parts of meat, fish, biscuit, dried peas, potatoes, and onions. They were washed down with water that tasted strongly of gunpowder. Grog was to be had. But more often than not it was used by midshipmen as a medium of exchange, the purchase price of more esteemed commodities or hush money to a bos'n's mate.

The table being cleared, the fun began. Sometimes resort was had to the poop, which served as an admirable castle. Sides were picked. One side detended and one attacked. Crows and pikestuffs formed splendid weapons of offence. Mops, brooms, and half-ports served to repel them. Sometimes the game was "follow-my-leader," up the lee mizzen shrouds, over the futtocks, down the weather shrouds, up the main, down the backstay, into the waist—a breathless dance. Sometimes a sleeper was discovered, and molasses were gently poured under him, that his form might be glued to the deck. But if the victim was a reveller who had been splicing the mainbrace and was three sheets in the wind, then the tormentors painted his face with red ochre, added black eyebrows and a fierce moustache, dressed him in a flaxen wig made from the fag ends of the tiller rope, crammed a cocked hat over his head, and completed the picture by removing his shirt and painting him blue like an ancient Briton.

Unpopular members of the midshipmen's berth and even deserving inmates of the orlop had often enough a terrible time. One night the gay young

sparks of the *Victory* caught the purser's steward, against whom they bore a grudge. Some cattle had recently been slaughtered, and they sewed him up in a bullock's skin. A bull-fight after the true Spanish pattern then followed. The toreadors flung cloaks over his head and brought him to the ground. The picadors prodded him with marlingspikes. And the matador put him out of his misery by knocking him over the head with a wooden sword. The idea of an animal running amok was always a source of boundless amusement. One night they insisted that a clerk whose name was Newnham was the admiral's cow got adrift. It was no use for the wretched fellow to protest. After hunting him from side to side, and flying in simulated fear at his approach, they suddenly clapped a selvagee round him with a hauling-line made fast, and roused him up the hatchway in a minute, terrified almost to death.

Sometimes considerable diversion was obtained by personating ghosts and goblins. The darkness of the tier and of the hold and the superstition of seamen afforded ample opportunity, and the midshipmen gave rein to their fantasy. Dear, too, were the joys obtained in moments stolen from duty. In the middle watch, when the night was as dark as pitch, when the wind was blowing half a gale and the rain descending in torrents, the midshipmen would steal down to their berth to stew beefsteaks. This was done by lighting several pieces of candle in the bottom of a lantern and sticking forks into the table round it, with a plate resting on them over the flame, the head of the lantern being off. The mess thus concocted was always voted delicious. But the sauce that gave such a tasty seasoning was, doubtless, the knowledge that the first lieutenant imagined them at the post of duty on the upper deck.

There was always the keenest rivalry between the

midshipmen of the *Victory* and the midshipmen of other vessels in the fleet. Disputes raged hotly between them over the comparative merits of their respective ships. Things which were voted a nuisance in the privacy of one's own berth were condoned and often vehemently supported in conversation with visitors. The first lieutenant was unanimously voted an officer and a gentleman, and the bos'n a worthy fellow. The laws of hospitality were scrupulously observed. But if strangers had the best of an argument, or carried a debate in their own favour, the unanswerable question, "Are you still on boiled parrot and monkey soup?" sent them home in a chastened frame of mind.

Play-acting was a favourite amusement with the young people. They would compose the play, make the dresses and wigs, rig up a stage and scene, and act with remarkable vigour and success. The great Napoleon himself, when a prisoner on board the *Bellerophon*, condescended to be present at such a performance, and to judge by the smile on his face, must have enjoyed himself immensely. In these amateur theatricals there was always a keen competition for the honour of "playing the woman." When forced to stay below in the berth the midshipmen preferred before other games either backgammon or "able whackets." This last was a game with cards, wherein the loser was beaten over the palms with a handkerchief tightly twisted like a rope. "Bait the bear" was a recreation of which no one grew tired except the unfortunate actor who was cast for the bear.

But to tell the truth, the happiest and merriest hours were spent in teasing a really gullible greenhorn. If this was unkind or undeserved, it is to be feared that all the midshipmen alike were to blame. They gave Johnny Raw or Johnny Newcome a

terrible time. No sooner was he in his hammock than they cut the clew and let him down with a bump. Or they fixed a fish-hook in the rim of his mattress and dragged it from under him; or they reefed his blanket—that is, they made the ends fast, and by numerous turns formed the blanket itself into a ring like a horse's collar, which an hour's work would not undo. While the wretched gulpin was asleep they stole his uniform, and, hiding it in the cook's oven, left him no alternative but to perambulate the ship in his blanket, making polite inquiries from whomsoever he met. When he yielded to the rigours of sea-sickness, they dosed him with a quart of sea water, or persuaded him that the symptoms would yield at once if he would swallow a piece of salt pork attached to a string, and draw it backwards and forwards. When he expressed inability even to move, they performed the kind office themselves. When he recovered, they sent him to find "Cheeks" the Marine, a quest that occasioned interminable research, for "Cheeks" was first cousin to Sairey Gamp's "Mrs. Harris," a creature that never existed. They sent him at dusk to hear the dog-fish bark. As he listened intently some of the youngsters yelped in the mizzen chains. He hastened, of course, to investigate, and was promptly doused with bucketfuls of water. They assured him that this sprinkled spray was the breath that the grampus blew. And if at any of their information he looked incredulous, they triced him half-way to the mizzen peak, with signal halliards lashed round his legs.

Occasionally, however, the tables were turned. Occasionally the tormentors were tormented. Occasionally the mischief-making midshipman was brought before a judge equally merciless. Then it was his turn to "buy goose" or suffer punishment. The commonest award meted out by the first

lieutenant was one of banishment. The wretched delinquent was sent to the main topmast cross-trees. At this dizzy eminence above the deck he was condemned to cool his heels sometimes for one hour, sometimes for two, sometimes for four, and sometimes for eight. Exposed to the weather, deprived of food and drink, robbed of the society of the berth, placed in a position where comfort was out of the question, the most wayward of malefactors became a penitent, and was glad to descend on any conditions. It might happen that his sentence was passed just as his hammock was slung below. In that case, if his term of exile were unduly prolonged, the bos'n was free to confiscate his sleeping accommodation and return it to his store. The mid was, in nine cases out of ten, unable at the moment to redeem the lost articles, and would have to content himself for a fortnight (or perhaps a month) with what rest he could snatch from the bare boards, or at best from a coiled-up cable.

A very contumacious and refractory fellow was sometimes spread-eagled—that is, he was lashed to the weather shrouds with arms and legs drawn in opposite directions. But if by chance the ship was in home waters or visiting home ports, a far more efficacious penalty was the denial of all permission to go ashore. Occasion sometimes arose when it was necessary to confine a young officer to his ship for three months together. This was a very heavy penalty indeed. And confinement was a punishment equally applicable at sea. For visiting as between ship and ship was usually possible on Sundays. If a midshipman really failed to behave himself, if he turned out a thoroughly bad character and displayed no desire or intention to reform, then he was dismissed his ship. This chastisement may be compared to the “sending down” of a university student.



The midshipman so treated not only lost touch with his messmates, not only brought disgrace upon his friends and family, but cut himself off from all chance of obtaining the one thing which the ship could give him—namely, the chance of quick promotion in the service. Transferred to another ship, he had to begin life over again and endeavour as best he might to live down a bad reputation.

Happily such cases were very rare. The midshipmen, alike in the *Victory* and in other ships, were keen and alert to a sense of duty, anxious above all to rise in their profession, and most amenable to discipline. High spirits might lead them for occasional airings to the cross-trees, but no one thought the worse of them for that. They were the life and soul of the ship. However freely the bos'n may have cursed them, however soundly the master may have rated them, there was no one aboard who did not relish their pranks so long as they were not directed against himself. It is enough that Nelson loved his "children" dearly, took them about with him when he went ashore, introduced them to his friends, and tried to make the ship a happier place for them. They repaid, of course, his indulgence with idolatry, and a midshipman it was that avenged his death.



## CHAPTER VII

### MANNING HER

*Britannia's high trident, still waving on high,  
Bids her tars all be true, and their foes all defy;  
To avenge all her wrongs they will conquer or die,  
Like brave jolly tars of Old England,  
The conquering brave British tars.* ANON.

IN no respect did the *Victory* differ more widely from a battleship of to-day than in the methods by which she was manned. When the captain came aboard for the first time, he found her practically uninhabited. There were the standing officers and their gangs. That was all. It was the captain's first duty to provide his vessel with a complement. This was no easy task. The nation in those days troubled itself not at all with the burden of training a navy in time of peace. It waited until war became a matter of hours, and then thrust its responsibilities upon the shoulders of the Service. The *Victory* required between eight hundred and nine hundred men. Whence were they to be obtained?

The captain first busied himself with the preparation of placards, posters, and handbills. In these he called for volunteers. In these he described with becoming enthusiasm the peculiar merits of his ship and the probable advantages to be expected from a cruise in her. In speed, he said, the vessel was a flyer; in seaworthy qualities just the barque that a sailor would love. Special attention was paid to provisioning, and the company might expect to feed on fresh meat and plenty of it. Pay might be no higher than

usual; but out of prize-money fortunes might be made that would rouse the envy of kings. There was a practical certainty of furious fighting; for even if the enemy attempted to escape, superior speed must wear him down. Above all, there was abundance of grog. No man who did his work aloft or alow should ever want the means of quenching his thirst.

With such allurements and arts the snare was set in the sight of the birds. And not wholly in vain. Some of the birds hopped in. They were blinded to the discomfort of life on board ship by the thought of prize-money, battle, and rum. These were crumbs of comfort sufficient to tempt a certain class of men. And others who had dreamed of life at sea, and endowed it with a glamour of their own imagining, only needed a little coaxing to draw them into the net. The number of volunteers depended, of course, very largely on the captain of the ship or the admiral whose flag she flew. A commander whose name was a guarantee for booty and battle, or a popular hero who was idolized for his own sake, would always enliven the rate of recruiting. It cannot be stated with certainty how many volunteers there were on board the *Victory* when first she put to sea, but at Trafalgar there were no less than 181. This number must not, however, be regarded as representative or characteristic. Men would come forward to fight with Nelson when all other inducements failed. Besides, the point that needs emphasizing here is not that the lure of Nelson's name brought nearly two hundred men to his ship, but rather that even when his flag was at the mast-head, more than six hundred of the requisite number failed altogether to put in an appearance.

The truth is, that the voluntary process was utterly powerless of itself to fill a ship, even when

that ship was the *Victory*. Government might offer bounties—did, in fact, very frequently offer bounties—thirty shillings or a couple of pounds for a willing hand, and, upon occasions, as much as twelve guineas for a really competent seaman; but money was not really more successful than fair words and promises. It brought the men in dribblets, not in multitudes.

Resort was therefore had to the system of impressment.

According to the long-established laws of the realm, the whole of the seafaring population of the British Isles were liable to serve His Majesty afloat. Their welfare was bound up with the welfare of the country. When the country was menaced, their welfare was menaced. It was their duty first to drive away the invader. There would be time enough afterwards for peaceful pursuits. Let but an accredited agent of the king clap into the hand of a mariner an imprest or advance payment of one shilling, and that mariner's services were lawfully, and by the counsel and consent of Parliament, at the disposal of the State.

At first sight it might be supposed that this method of impressment did not vary greatly from the method of recruiting His Majesty's army. But the resplendent sergeant and his dapper drummer-boy made no use whatsoever of compulsion. Whereas compulsion was the very essence of impressment, and it was of compulsion that the merchant seamen complained.

It seems grossly and flagrantly unfair that a worker who has chosen one profession should be forced against his will into another—that a man who is all for a quiet life should be compelled to face the wild alarms of war. But there was unanswerable logic in the reasoning of Parliament. It was absolutely necessary, they argued, that at least one-third

of a battleship's complement should be composed of real and trustworthy seamen. One-third! Certainly no captain in the Navy would be so foolish as to put to sea with less. What then? Trained men were required, and one corporation only could provide them. The mercantile marine had a splendidly organized and a properly recruited service. The apprentices went to sea at an early age, and when their novitiate was over they were in a position to earn wages higher by far than the average sum obtainable in His Majesty's fleet. It was vain to expect that men who were well off would fling away a good berth for a bad. There was only one thing to be done. For the nucleus of thorough-paced handy-men essential to the working of a battleship, the agents of His Majesty were empowered by Parliament to lay their hands on members of the mercantile marine. Violence alone could supply the Navy with highly-trained workmen at a lower wage than that which was current in the labour market. And violence of the requisite sort was, therefore, legalized.

The press-gang—that is to say, the agency of impressment—did most of its recruiting at sea. In time of war there were some forty-three depots round the coast, with an establishment which kept twenty-seven captains and sixty-three lieutenants always hard at work. From the depots the gangs set forth in pursuit of prey. Coming alongside in a tender, they would board a merchantman, and the officer in command would request the skipper to pipe all hands on deck. The men were duly marshalled, and the recruiting officer inspected them, and picked out the best for the king's service. It was an odious business, and it is not to be supposed that anybody enjoyed it. The laws of the land ordained that the leader of the press-gang should be a commissioned officer, and forbade the commissioned

officer in question to make seizure of a single man without a warrant of impressment. It might happen that an officer would try to raise recruits without a warrant; but in that event the merchant seamen were not bound to submit if they were strong enough to deliver themselves. There is an interesting case extant in the records of the law, showing that a merchant seaman shot dead the officer commanding the press-gang as he came over the side; and was acquitted on the capital charge because he pleaded (and was able to prove) that the murdered man was a petty officer and had never held a commission.

The victimized merchantmen were usually assailed as they reached harbour, or as they cruised in the narrow seas, or as they dropped anchor in the Thames. On November 25, 1796, an East Indiaman picked up her moorings in Long Reach. That same evening the boats of H.M.S. *Britannia* boarded her, and carried off all her men but twenty-three. These armed themselves to the teeth, and barricading themselves in the bread-room, determined to sell their lives dearly. But the next day their hearts failed them. They surrendered, and were carried to the flagship. In this manner the entire ship's company was drafted from the merchantman into His Majesty's service. The journey to India and back was a long one in those days. There was no short cut through the Suez Canal. The merchant seamen for days had been looking forward to a happy reunion with their families. Yet without being allowed to put a foot on dry land, they were hunted like animals and carried off, perhaps to be maimed for life, perhaps to die, in the service of a country that felt no pity, no qualms of conscience, no commiseration.

There was something, too, in the impressment system that can only be described as utterly antagonistic to the British sense of sport and fair play. This

is well brought out by Captain Marryat in his novel called *Jacob Faithful*. Faithful was a waterman who plied for hire upon the Thames. After serving for a time as an apprentice, he obtained at last a wherry of his own. And then one day he was approached by a master's-mate, who asked to be rowed down to Gravesend. The task was anything but a welcome one, and Jacob felt more than half inclined to refuse. But the young fellow was urgent. He was late as it was. If he failed to rejoin in time, his career would be ruined. He offered anything in reason. Jacob was well enough off. He cared little enough for the money. But he was kindhearted, and yielded. So they ran down to Gravesend on the tide, and found the *Immortalité*, a fine frigate of forty guns. As Jacob gazed at her mast-head vanes glittering above him like stars, he could not withhold his admiration. But this was quickly turned to hot anger and helpless dismay when the *Immortalité*, happening to be somewhat short-handed, carried him off to sea before the mast.

There can be little cause for wonder if the merchant seaman of the *Victory's* day thought himself ill used. He was ill used. He was abominably ill used. Sometimes he endeavoured to show his resentment; though this, of course, could do him little good. Sir John Alexander Gordon, the last Governor of Greenwich, tells a fine story in illustration of this. Sir John fought with Foley at the Battle of the Nile, and lived to be an Admiral of the Fleet. He had a rough exterior that was almost as dear to the tars as the kind heart within. He usually dressed in a Flushing jacket and a sou'-wester, and in this disguise was once employed by a midshipman to carry luggage up to an hotel.

A certain victim impressed by Sir John pleaded very hard indeed to be excused. He looked a fine

fellow and a thorough seaman, and Sir John would not let him off. The man swore with an oath that in one arm he was paralysed. But this would not do either. Sir John handed him over to the surgeon. The surgeon examined the arm, and reported that it was strong and shapely and in no way different from its fellow. Yet that it dropped when unsupported was evident enough, and its owner seemed powerless to raise it. Sir John thought the man was shamming, and, to break his spirit, reduced him to the lowest position in the ship. The degradation, however, was quite without effect. As sweeper, the paralytic attended strictly to business, cleared up the refuse, and made all straight, with one arm hugging the handle of his broom and the other glued to his side.

So things continued until a certain day in November, when a French ship, the *Pomone*, was sighted, and Sir John resolved to give battle. The decks were cleared and the guns run out. The sweeper made one of the afterguard. His place was at one of the quarter-deck guns, and as he came to his station, Sir John recognized him. Would the man reveal himself in the heat of battle? No. However often the gun was loaded and reloaded, the same routine was always observed. The suspect hauled on the gun-tackle fall with a single hand. There was a sulky look in the fellow's face. But that, of course, might betoken something quite different from resentment. Perhaps the paralytic was disappointed that he could take so feeble a share in the battle. Sir John himself, you see, was beginning to doubt. And as he doubted a round-shot from the enemy skimmed over the bulwarks and smashed his leg. He dropped. But before he could reach the deck two strong arms went round him; and the limb which had been watched for months and never been seen to move



now held up the idol of the lower deck as if he had been a baby.

If it was at sea that the press-gang gathered its richest harvest, it was ashore that its activities excited the most interest and discussion; for it was only on shore that the proceedings of the gang came under the observation of the public. As soon as night fell the lieutenant in charge selected his men, and armed them with clubs, handspikes, truncheons, broom-handles, stretchers, cudgels, and cobs. Wooden implements alone were used. The gang went forth in search of recruits and was expected to bring back men in sound condition. A broken head would heal. But there was no sense in carrying fire-arms. These could only occasion a real battle which would reduce the slums and by-streets to a butcher's shambles. Cutlasses were sometimes carried by members of the party, but more to prove to the enemy the fruitlessness of resistance than to be used in real earnest. Seamen of a hot and hasty temper were always left on board.

It was only, of course, in seaport towns that these nocturnal raids were made, in such places as Sheerness, Portsmouth, Devonport, Gravesend, Rotherhithe, and Wapping. It was not that the press-gang were powerless to strike elsewhere. It was not that the expenses of conducting inland operations were bound to prove excessive. The press-gang were not hunting the genus "man," but the species "merchant seaman." Legally they were not allowed to impress any other person. Actually they were glad to take any fish that came into their net. The pressed men who were not merchant seamen were about as helpless in the clutches of the gang as the mackerel in a Brixham trawler. On one occasion the great John Wesley himself was impressed. He was so obviously not a fish that they were obliged



to let him go. But numberless others with equal right to be excused were less fortunate in proving their identity.

The lieutenant and his myrmidons, landing from their boat, moved quietly through the darkness. They passed along unfrequented alleys until they reached the haunts of the sailor-men—the common lodging houses, the gin-shops, and the low-class inns and hostels. A pause was made in some dark corner that all might assemble and have their weapons ready. Then a descent was made on the “Blue Boar” or the “Admiral Benbow.” One or two ran to the back of the house to guard the exit; the rest precipitated themselves through the front-door, and plunging into the bar parlour, caused utter consternation among the company assembled there. Tables and benches were overthrown, mugs were broken to fragments, and the beer trickled down upon the sanded floor. Someone made haste to extinguish the lamp. But the seamen were too clever. Their experience told them exactly what to do. The anxious movements of those attempting to escape betrayed them even in the darkness. Cudgels were used freely against those who showed fight.

Sometimes news of the press got abroad in good time, and the victims made haste to escape. On these occasions their wives would assemble in squadrons and belabour the seamen as in duty bound they moved to the assault of some grog-shop. The seamen would put them aside, laughing, and saying, “Be quiet, Poll!” “Don’t be foolish, Molly!” “Out of the light, Sue!”—exercising always an admirable mixture of gentle firmness and incurable good-nature, although the blood might be streaming down their faces. A scene such as this is shown by Gillray in his picture, “Manning the Fleet.” Two women are offering the most furious opposition. One twists

her fingers in a seaman's hair, and at the same time pulls his ear and kicks his shins. Another, with a child hanging on to her skirts, lays about her with a mop. The seaman most to be pitied smiles seraphically.

When the press-gang swept the ports, every ship-owner and every broker leagued together to thwart it. The merchant seamen were required to man the merchantmen, and if enough were not forthcoming the trade would be spoiled. So hiding-places were devised, and havens of refuge. One such is extant in the "Star and Garter" at Portsmouth. It is a room ten feet by six. Once inside, the refugees were safe enough; for though the chamber has four walls, it has nothing resembling a door.

The foreigners to be found in British seaports proved an easy prey of the press-gang. There were always plenty of them, strangers arriving and strangers departing. Most of them were merchant seamen. But whether they were sailor-men or not, they were generally ignorant of English customs, and for the most part ignorant of English speech. They were, therefore, peculiarly liable to be caught. In fact, the British Parliament had to legislate lest too large a proportion of a vessel's complement was made up of foreigners. In 1707 the French Government complained that the British Admiralty had drafted into their fleet all the prisoners that Marlborough took at the Battle of Ramillies. This, perhaps, was an exceptional case. But it was no exception to find that 15 per cent. of the men on board a British man-of-war were of foreign birth. This, if anything, is an under-estimate. Of course, it would not be difficult to point to individual ships which had less than 15 per cent. The *Victory* at Trafalgar, as we should expect, had fewer aliens than was usual; but she had no less than seventy-one. There

were Swedes, Norwegians, Hindus, Germans, Italians, Portuguese, Swiss, Dutch, Kanakas, Americans, and Danes. And most remarkable of all—French. There were periods of her history when the *Victory* had many more foreigners than seventy-one. Their presence on board was not thought in any way derogatory to her dignity. Parliament, in fact, when a fleet was mobilized, offered easy terms of naturalization to aliens who gave their services without being pressed. Excited members occasionally protested against the employment of so large a percentage of foreigners in British battleships, but they were always overruled. If only Britons could be legally employed, how would it have been possible to bring home from across the sea a ship that had lost one-half or two-thirds of her company? How, for example, under such conditions, could Anson ever have completed his journey round the world?

Even when the press-gang had done its best, or perhaps we should say, its worst—even when all the sweepings had been brought on board—the *Victory* was still not fully manned. She was obliged—very much against her will—to make use of certain classes of undesirables. A law of Queen Elizabeth's reign, a law that was still unrepealed when the *Victory* first made up her complement, was worded as follows: "Rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars shall be, and are hereby directed to be, taken up, sent, conducted, and conveyed into H.M. service at sea." Rogues, of course, were not murderers, robbers, forgers, and coiners. They were not felons and miscreants, but merely what we should call to-day "unemployed." Still, they were not very much more welcome on that account; for the unemployed are often unemployable.

Other undesirables who were not wanted ashore, and were in consequence carted off to man the

*Victory* and her consorts, were the debtors. Many who had burdened themselves with liabilities which they could not hope to meet went without being asked. They paid their bills—to use a common expression—"with the fag end of the topsail sheet." But all debtors, before being consigned to the Marshalsea or other place of detention, were given the option of joining His Majesty's Navy. Many were of Doctor Johnson's opinion, and thought prison preferable. Richard Parker, the king of naval mutineers, the leader of the insurgents at the Nore, was not one of these. To escape imprisonment he went to the fleet. As the tender conveyed him to a battleship he changed his mind, and tried to drown himself. But he was saved, and shipped before the mast, where his birth and education made him the mouthpiece of the discontented and evilly disposed.

The presence of such gentry on board ship makes it easier to appreciate the worth of the marines. The "soldiers" formed between one-fifth and one-fourth of the *Victory's* complement. In war their duties were twofold. If an attack was made on the enemy's shore, they composed the landing-party. If an attack was made on the enemy's fleet, they formed the sharp-shooters. Trained under martial conditions, subjected to military discipline, they supplied an element which might be looked for in vain among lascars, adventurers, gamesters, and gaol-birds—an implicit and instant obedience to orders. It would not be quite fair, perhaps, to call them the ship's police; but if a spirit of mischief or rowdyism got abroad, they were on the side of law and order and stood by the officers. Their weapon—the small arm—made their assistance invaluable.

This will readily be understood. But even under the eye of the law, were the ordinary landmen, were

the debtors and rogues, were the sweepings of the harbour slums, ever of the very slightest assistance to anyone? How at sea did the *Victory* fare with so many lubbers on board? To suppose these creatures a source of anxiety is to misunderstand the nature of a ship of the line. The *Victory* was not merely a floating garrison; it was a little world in itself. There were not merely fighting-men and sailors; there were bakers and brewers and cooks, and tin-smiths and painters and blacksmiths, and cobblers and tailors. If a man had no trade whatsoever to boast of, there were positions on board which called for nothing more than the outfit of the unskilled labourer: sweepers, cleaners, dustmen, servants—mere hewers of wood and drawers of water. And let it be clearly understood that the wastrels of the town and the loafers and the good-for-nothings very soon became different men on board an old man-of-war. There was no opportunity to dawdle or waste time. They found themselves under relentless taskmasters. The spirit of the community made shirking impossible. And what the best petty officer could not do, Father Neptune himself undertook. As for riggers—as for men to hand, reef and steer, to climb aloft in a howling gale and gather up the bunt of the foresail—if more of this commodity was wanted, most captains undertook in less than a twelvemonth to make an able seaman out of “anything.”

When the new hands were brought on board the *Victory*, they were passed in review by the surgeon, the purser, and the bos’n. The surgeon conducted a critical examination. There was clearly no use in carrying to sea the germs of disease; for in the confined space sickness spread rapidly. Still the great majority came through the ordeal. Not infrequently the surgeon gave orders that plenty of hot water

should be prepared, together with soap and scrubbing-brushes, so that the new-comers might be adequately cleansed, or, in the language of the foc's'le, "soused from clew to earing." A visit to the ship's barber was then the only thing necessary to effect a complete transformation.

When the recruits came before the purser he opened his book and entered details about each in turn. The information which he received he tabulated in five columns. In the first he inserted the man's name, in the second his age, in the third the length of his service, in the fourth the nature of his service, and in the last his qualifications. All this, of course, was extremely important; for from such a methodical compilation the captain could gather in a moment what sort of a company he had. He could elevate one man to be captain of the maintop, and put down another to be "old lady of the gun-room." The purser's book constituted a standing record of any given cruise. In it were entered all particulars of service and of character. It was a book of destiny. It recorded punishments inflicted. It totted up the amount of prize-money due. It might be the seaman's greatest friend; too often it was his most formidable enemy.

Dismissed by the purser, the newly raised men came under the inspection of the bos'n. The bos'n was a judge in the first instance of presentability. The question he had to settle was this: were the clothes or slops in which a man came aboard fit to be worn on board His Majesty's ship? The garments in question might have been already condemned as insanitary by the surgeon. In which case there was no room for doubt. If, however, they were decently presentable, the bos'n was willing to pass them, because new slops were obtainable at the expense of the wearer, and it seemed hard to tax

those who had as yet earned nothing. The new-comers were generally referred to by the seamen as "Long Toggies" because of the length of their coats. If these were approved as to quality by the arbiter of taste, a bos'n's-mate drew his clasp-knife and converted the "Long Toggie" into a seaman by the simple process of cutting off his tails.

It is strange to think that the *Victory's* men, at any rate during Nelson's lifetime, were allowed to dress as they liked. One would imagine that this licence would produce a motley effect that was neither smart nor becoming. But as a matter of fact there was a real approach to uniformity. The men had their own idea of what was correct, and tried to realize it. The latest comers endeavoured to ape their betters, partly because it is human nature to do so, and partly because by discarding their old clothes they were more likely to be mistaken for able seamen. Moreover, when new slops were needed, the only emporium was the purser's store. And the purser's store contained no variety. Everything conformed to stock and standard patterns.

The men of the *Victory* were dressed something after the following mode.

They wore check shirts, and white or buff trousers of canvas, duck, or jean. The trousers were short in the leg and loose at the ankle in order to show coloured stockings. These were set off to the best possible advantage by low-cut shoes or pumps with neat buckles or very large bows. The favourite colour for the waistcoat was red. But buff was accepted as a substitute, and some preferred a flowered design or a stripe. Over the waistcoat came a blue jacket cut very short in the waist, with two or three rows of buttons, and narrow strips of white canvas along the seams of the back and sleeves. The coat had no collar, but a handkerchief was worn



round the neck and knotted. The really chic thing in neck-wear was a kerchief of black silk. The object of the kerchief was to protect the jacket from the pigtail. The pigtail, which became fashionable shortly after the *Victory* was laid down, tended each year to increase in size. Its occasional dressing was a tremendous business. One tar waited on another, and horsehair and various other constituents were worked into the composition to give the queue its proper length and rigidity. Over it was worn a straw hat that was painted with black enamel, or japanned, to render it waterproof. It was low in the crown and broad in the brim. The brim was sometimes turned up at the side to show a coloured lining. A ribbon was fastened round it with a very large knot at the side. The name *Victory* was painted on the ribbon or engraved on a little copper plate attached to it.

The world of men aboard the *Victory* were divided into two watches, so that half the company might always be at work. Each watch worked by spells of four hours apiece, except between four in the afternoon and eight o'clock at night. This period was divided into dog-watches of two hours, so that the routine might daily alternate. In times of stress the cry "All hands on deck!" summoned both watches, starboard and port, to struggle against the wiles of the French or the fury of a snoring gale.

The men messed on the gun and middle decks. One deck alone would not accommodate them. They slung their mess tables from hooks in the beams and made merry between the guns. The salt meat was often as hard as boards; in fact, it was sometimes carved by the tars into curios, which are said to have taken a high polish. When thoroughly boiled it was not altogether unlike old rope, and in consequence was christened "junk." The biscuit



was often maggoty. But the grog flowed freely and atoned for everything. At nightfall those off duty, facetiously known as "the watch below," carried down their hammocks from the hammock-nettings. The hammock-nettings ran along the top of the bulwarks, the three-inch mesh taking a trough-like form from the U-shaped iron cranes which supported it at intervals. When the hammocks were stowed in the nettings, the men on the upper deck had a breast-work against the small-arm fire of the enemy. When they were slung at night on the lower and middle decks there was not an inch of elbow-room anywhere—and this although only half the ship's company turned in. From fourteen to sixteen inches were allowed between the clews of one hammock and the clews of the next. The bodies of the men, in fact, were practically touching. They were packed almost as tightly as cigars. Both decks in consequence suffered greatly in the matter of ventilation. Steps were taken to introduce fresh air by means of wind sails. But these did not serve the purpose for which they were intended. They did not diffuse the oxygen. They merely put those who slept immediately below them in a most uncomfortable draught. The gentlemen in question refused to be victimized, and closed the aperture with a lanyard.

So long as they were afloat the seamen of old were as fine a body of men as this or any other country ever produced—as brave as paladins, as simple and affectionate as children, as bold as lions, as generous and as versatile as only themselves could be. Only in one respect were they inferior to the seamen of to-day. "They worked like horses afloat and they behaved like asses ashore." It was not entirely their own fault. They were encouraged to spin impossible yarns. They were expected to behave in a mad, capricious fashion. The salt of the sea was supposed

to have affected their brain, and every form of mad extravagance was indulged in. They received no wages during their cruise, but drew their money when their ship was paid off. They came ashore with pockets full of gold, determined to spend it while they had the chance. They bought consignments of watches and fried them in frying-pans. They treated every thirsty soul that they came across. They ate bank-notes between bread and butter. No prank was too childish, no antic amiss. Above all, they loved to hire coaches and career madly through town and country. The vehicle was always treated like a ship. The interior was laden with provisions; flags were hoisted; and the shouting, bawling, hilarious crew took their station on deck—that is to say, on the roof. One man was set to keep a good look-out, and the rest performed high jinks on their unstable platform with a fiddler in their midst. When the good ship rolled over lumpy roads they carolled and crowed with delight, and at last dropped anchor in some tavern yard, where they sang of battle, love, and wine while the merry can went round.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CAMPAIGNING

*We lose sight of land like bold hearts of thunder,  
And now we're at sea, we'll rant and we'll roar;  
We'll make all the Frenchmen and Spaniards knock under  
When our loud two-and-thirties re-echo once more.* ANON.

IN early days, when a naval crisis arose, all ships were pressed into the battle-line irrespective of size. But as time went on, and the knowledge and experience of commanders increased, fleets were made more homogeneous. It was recognized, and rightly recognized, that one weak vessel might betray a dozen strong ones, simply by reason of her weakness. In 1588, when the Invincible Armada arrived, 197 British vessels went out to fight it. A century later, at the Battle of Barfleur, King William III opposed the fleet of Louis XIV with a hundred sail of the line. But in the greatest sea-battle ever fought, when two nations went down before the might of England, Nelson had only twenty-seven ships.

By the time the *Victory* was built, all the smaller fighting-ships had been assigned to purposes other than participation in a pitched battle. For this grand purpose three rates alone were eligible. There were a large number of medium-sized ships called "third-rates," of which the *Bellerophon* may stand as the type; there were a medium number of large vessels called "second-rates," of which the *Temeraire* may stand as the type; and there were a few giants called "first-rates," like the *Victory*. But these last ships formed

a very small proportion of the fleet. In October 1805 there were 912 vessels on the Navy List, and of these only twelve besides the *Victory* were classed as first-rate ships.

What were these thirteen for, and why were they built?

On shore at the time of the *Victory's* launch it was still possible for a commander-in-chief to choose a position from which the whole contest would be visible, yet from which he could direct operations without taking undue risks. Afloat such a course was impossible. The fleet entered battle in a long straggling column like an army on the march. The ships stretched as far as the eye could scan, till, even when seen from the topmast head, they faded in the mists of the horizon. And this long, unwieldy fighting array was in motion throughout the engagement.<sup>1</sup>

Where, then, was the correct position for the admiral? There was no use in his being on the top of a high tower ashore, for in a short time the ships would be out of sight; there was no use in his being at either end of the line, for at one extremity he was not properly visible from the other. Custom demanded that he should station himself in the centre of his fleet. As this was also the thick of the fight and the hottest of the fray, it was incumbent on the State to build him a vessel that could not be taken by the enemy; for on the safety of the flagship the battle turned. Every ship of the fleet watched and waited for her signals, and if disaster overtook her, the day was lost beyond repair. The destruction

<sup>1</sup> Two of the most famous sea-fights, the Nile and Copenhagen, were fought at anchor. But these were exceptions. The French at the Nile did not suspect that there was a hostile fleet anywhere near, and in consequence kept a poor look-out. At Copenhagen the Danes did not desire to fight, and imagined that they had drawn their ships out of harm's way.

of the *Eendracht* at Lowestoft (1665) involved the Dutch in irremediable ruin. The destruction of the *Orient* at the Nile brought a similar fate upon the French. Neither of these disasters, however, was occasioned by the foe. Indeed, before she destroyed herself, the *Orient* in less than an hour literally pulverized the *Bellerophon*, though the *Bellerophon* enjoyed a tremendous reputation and on this occasion excelled herself in courage and hardihood. The *Ville de Paris*, it is true, although a first-rate, was captured by Rodney at the Battle of the Saints. But it would be difficult to cite another such example. And the *Ville de Paris* was not taken till the conflict was over, till those who should have supported her were scattered in flight, and she was left alone upon the battlefield hedged round by a circle of foes. The first-rate might be overwhelmed by numbers, but she could hold her own against half-a-dozen smaller ships, and under normal conditions was impregnable.

If this is true—if the secret of invincibility had been discovered—why were not more first-rates constructed? Why were there thirteen only in the year of Trafalgar? Partly, no doubt, because the cost of a first-rate was prohibitive. For the same money four third-rates could be bought. But this was not the only reason. There was another more important.

In these latter days a battleship can proceed without let or hindrance in any direction she pleases. The sailing man-of-war could not do so. She could undertake to reach a given point, but she could not undertake to go there straight ahead. There were times when she had to steer a zigzag course, the relative straightness or obliquity of her route depending on the wind. To-day we gauge the sea-going qualities of a battleship by the question, "How many

knots?" In the *Victory's* day the question that wanted answering was, "How near to the wind will the vessel sail?"

The answer was given in *points*—that is to say, "compass-points," of which there are thirty-two. The smart two-decker could lie up within six points of the wind. If the wind was north, she could steer towards twenty points of the compass with her bowsprit pointing exactly to her destination. But this still left twelve points (or three-eighths of a circle) that were closed to a direct advance. To reach any point between W.N.W. and E.N.E. with the wind at north, she would have to exchange the directness of the crow's flight for the sidelong shuffle of the snake. And however smart she might be, there was still correction to be made for leeway. If the wind was north and she was advancing to the west, she would always tend to be driven somewhat to the southward of her path. If the leeway was considerable, it was mere pretence and make-believe to say that her progress was directly ahead. But as a matter of fact in the smart two-decker the correction for leeway was inconsiderable.

Now the tremendous effect of a first-rate battleship was obtained by piling deck upon deck, and this mode of construction was bound to detract from a vessel's sea-going qualities. Her sides were so high that they acted like sails and bore her to leeward of her course. She lost by leeway more than she made by the fineness of her entry or the cleanness of her run aft. This explains why first-rates never multiplied as a class, and indirectly it discloses the secret of the *Victory's* success. The *Victory* was blessed from the time of her launch with sailing qualities that no other three-decker ever had. Her builders, indeed, had devised no new thing. There was just some happy accident in her composition

that enabled her to outsail all other first-rates. This was the fortunate gift that the fairies bestowed upon her at her christening. This was the reason why all admirals on appointment to a fleet-command asked for the *Victory* as their flagship, and refused to be put off with anything else if the *Victory* was available.

The first admiral to secure her services was Admiral Keppel. The occasion was the interference of the French in King George III's quarrel with his subjects in North America (1778). Keppel had served through the Seven Years' War when the *Victory* lay a-building. He had established his reputation by his peerless handling of his ship at Quiberon. He was the favourite disciple of Lord Hawke, and was regarded as inheriting in a peculiar way his master's methods and precepts. Before putting to sea, he removed from the *Victory's* stern her golden-lettered title, treating in the same way all the other ships of his fleet, because he considered such aids to identification of service only to the enemy.

Keppel sighted the French off Ushant in July 1778. The wind was blowing from the west, and the enemy were to windward. They had heard that British convoys were expected from the Indies, and with hopes running high had sallied forth for a foray. At sight of Keppel's fleet they would have been glad to return to Brest. But Keppel's position prevented them from doing so. They therefore made off into the Atlantic, and Keppel gave chase. As the wind was foul, both fleets were obliged to wriggle along, twisting alternately from one tack to the other. Though the French could generally show a clean pair of heels to anyone, such was Keppel's impetuosity that he began to overhaul them. But in the ardour of pursuit he sacrificed some of the symmetry of his fleet, and his line began to lose its order and cohesion.

The French commander, who had kept his fleet perfectly aligned, saw that his adversary was making battle unavoidable at the expense of his array. His own retreat was not dictated by motives of fear. If battle was inevitable, he resolved to engage before his opponent expected him to do so.

He suddenly turned to fight. His ships ran off the wind—that is to say, they turned their backs to it, swinging round, not one by one, but the entire fleet together, each vessel independently and all simultaneously. The manœuvre was an exceedingly difficult one, but was magnificently performed.

Before the manœuvre the French had been sailing southwards. Now mile beyond mile<sup>1</sup> of stately ships, moving at the volition of a single will, turned and made sail to the north. And as they did so, they reduced the interval that separated them from the English to a range that enabled them to open fire.

As the English were still proceeding southwards, the two fleets passed one another on opposite courses: the English on the starboard tack, for they still had the breeze to the right of them; and the French on the larboard, with the wind to their left. This method of engagement was grateful to the French commander. He had received instructions not to fight, and had been forced to engage. The fleets were already drawing away from each other like an "up" train and a "down" on parallel railway lines.

Thus the first battle in which the *Victory* took part was not a battle to the death, like the Nile or Tsushima. Yet at least it serves well enough to show the different ideas prevailing in the French and English fleets as to the lines on which a sea-fight should be conducted. The English made war on *men*; the French on *ships*.

This seems hardly credible at first. For the English

<sup>1</sup> Keppel's line was ten miles long.



fired at their enemies' hulls, and the French at sails and rigging. These targets, however, were selected for other reasons than are immediately apparent.

The English, taught by the presiding genius of their island home, were fiercely jealous of any rival sea-power. To see a hostile fleet was to destroy it. Lords of the sea they believed themselves, and sovereignty is indivisible. Now a fleet of itself is merely a collection of inanimate objects. It is the men inside her that make a ship what she is. Destroy the men, reduce them to a state of panic or demoralization, and the ship is yours. Remove the men from the fleet or reduce its manhood to impotence, and the mightiest squadron that ever put to sea becomes so much helpless weight of mere material, and may be had for the trouble of carting away.

The English, therefore, fired at their enemies' hulls, at the walls behind which their opponents strove to shield themselves. Their particular aim was at the gun-ports, where the gun-crews were bound to expose themselves. They fired on the downward recoil of their ship in order to batter the hull. And the practice made skilful gunners of them; for, if they mistimed a discharge, their broadside was wasted in the sea.

The French saw no purpose in what they regarded as fighting for fighting's sake. The most eminent of their admirals saw nothing to admire in Grenville's last fight at Flores, or Benbow's single-handed duel with half-a-dozen ships off Santa Marta. "*C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre.*" Among themselves there was a tradition that sea-battles were only justifiable when there was a definite stake to be fought for—an island to be taken, a town relieved, troop-ships to be safeguarded, or merchantmen protected. On the present occasion there was no definite issue. No French interests were involved;

nothing vital was put to the hazard. A cruise that promised satisfactory results had been interrupted, and must be abandoned. That was all. The main thing now was to clear the way home, so that the fleet might be spared to serve its turn when a real occasion arose.

As usual, therefore, they fired at sails and rigging. Their endeavour was to paralyse their foes by hamstringing their ships. They loaded with scrap-iron which tore canvas to shreds. They fired on the upward roll, for a fortunate shot might bring down a topmast. And the loss of a topmast might ruin everything, as Byng found to his cost at Minorca. In any case, if the shot reached its mark some part of the rigging was injured; and the masts, robbed of their supports, rolled their bodies about in a manner as absurd as it was vigorous, till they shook themselves out of their sockets or fell with a tangled skein of wreckage over the vessel's side.

At this Battle of Ushant the *Victory* was in the very centre of the line, and Keppel handled her as he handled the *Torbay* at Quiberon. At Quiberon his antagonist had disappeared altogether. But then there was the weather to help. On the present occasion the *Victory* matched herself with the *Bretagne*, Monsieur d'Orvilliers' flagship, and buffeted her opponent's flank so rudely that gun-ports lost their sharpness of outline, and three of them crumbled away like tinder to form one gaping and horrible chasm. Keppel's captains did their best to emulate the Admiral's example. And the French on their part with equal keenness blazed away at masts and sails.

What was the result?

The ineffectual nature of the French fire is proved by actual figures. On board the *Victory* there were eleven killed and twenty-four men wounded. The

*Victory's* casualty list was the heaviest but one in the whole fleet, and on board the *Formidable*, where the numbers were greater, an explosion proved as mischievous as the French fire. In many ships the casualties numbered one or two, and in some cases none at all. But on the other hand, many vessels suffered so severely aloft that they lost all power of further manœuvring; and in certain cases the damage was so extensive that, until repairs had been undertaken, the ships in question were powerless to tack.

Meanwhile the French streamed away from the battlefield. Their ships were as fresh as they could be, ready to twist and turn, to double and bend, to wear all together or tack in succession. Down below, it is true, the decks re-echoed with the cries of the wounded and the groans of the dying. Gangs of seamen in the hold gave hundreds of dead men burial in the ballast. But the sun-kissed sails gave no hint of this. And the battle had not been sufficiently prolonged for the sustained horror of the British fire to demoralize their opponents. There were, in consequence, no surrenders.

Among British fleet-commanders at this time there were two battle maxims in which all alike reposed implicit trust. The first was as follows: "Keep nearer to the wind than your adversary, so that the battle cannot be postponed if you wish to begin nor begun until you are ready." And the second, "Having secured the advantage of the wind, set yourself on the same tack as your opponent, so that the combat may continue until you have destroyed him."<sup>1</sup> Keppel at Ushant was unduly handicapped. He enjoyed neither of the advantages

<sup>1</sup> In single-ship duels a pair of frigates would sometimes run on parallel courses more than two hundred miles before the final victory declared itself.

which experts considered essential. That he brought the foe to battle in the teeth of the wind reflects great credit on his seamanship; and nothing, we may be sure, would have induced him to fight on opposite tacks if he could possibly have avoided doing so.

The engagement was begun before he was ready, and ended just as he was warming to his work. The result was a drawn battle.

Keppel, in his dispatch, complained that his enemies had run away. What he meant was that, if the French had been willing to engage him on his own terms, they would never have reached home again. He was doubtless right. But there was no reason why they should fight him on his own terms. To the French his ill-considered criticism seemed a levelled insult, and, as a counterblast, they put in a claim to the victory. A picturesque writer on their side of the Channel drew a striking contrast between the compulsion that was put upon Britons to induce them to serve afloat and the eagerness with which recruits came pouring into every seaport of France. What wonder, he asked, if the hirelings of George were repulsed by the sailors of Louis? As a matter of fact, the Frenchmen had as much right to claim that they had occupied the British Isles as that they had defeated the British hearts of oak at Ushant.

The battle was drawn, if ever there was meaning in the word. The result was perhaps more immediately favourable to the French because it induced other European Powers to join the anti-British coalition. But in the long run the balance of advantage rested with Keppel's countrymen. For the engagement induced the French to cling to their ideas of naval warfare. And these were radically unsound: the day would come when they would repeat the

experiment of Ushant, and find that neither favourable wind nor opposite tack would avail them.

The Battle of Ushant was succeeded by an unseemly dispute which culminated in an open scandal and trial at law. The friends of Keppel tried to fasten the responsibility for want of success on the shoulders of the Ministry. They argued that the fleet had been badly equipped, ill-found, and retarded by insensate delays. The supporters of the Government retaliated by charging Keppel with failure to follow up the first round of the fight with a second round more conclusive. On his own showing the French had run away. What on earth was there to prevent him from pursuing them?

Both sides to the dispute, consciously or unconsciously, adopted a similar line of reasoning. Save for some untoward event, the English are bound to be victorious in a sea-battle. On this occasion the English were not victorious. Therefore there must have been an untoward event.

There is no need here to quarrel with the argument. Both sides, however, were entirely wrong in the "untoward event" upon which they fixed. If the fleet had been so miserably ill-found as to preclude it from winning a victory, Keppel had no business to take it to sea; and if its departure was unduly delayed, how did he manage to catch the French? On the other hand, Keppel could not renew the fight, because the enemy had disappeared. This was in no sense his fault. The French did everything in their power to make him believe that they were waiting a resumption of hostilities, and then slipped away under cover of night.

The untoward event, if such there was, was the skilful manœuvring of the French. Nobody in England at the time would have accepted this judgment except a few unprejudiced critics in naval

circles. And their opinion would not have been listened to, even if it had been given.

But if it was untrue that the laxness of the Government had prevented Keppel from destroying the French, it was certainly true that the Government had been lax—the Admiralty especially. Therefore, to avoid a public inquiry into their own misdeeds, the Ministry carried the war into the enemy's camp and brought Keppel to trial by court-martial. Extraordinary interest was taken in the case, and the recollection of Byng put the brave Admiral in dread of a humiliating death upon the scaffold. How he bore himself in his distress may be gathered from the grand portrait of him in the National Gallery by his admiring crony Sir Joshua Reynolds. It was presented by Keppel to Dunning, Lord Ashburton, for legal assistance during the trial.

Keppel's acquittal was hailed by an outburst of enthusiasm comparable with that which greeted the release of the "Seven Bishops." The Portsmouth vestry books show that a sum of five shillings was spent on beer for the bell-ringers. And when staid churchwardens went as far as five shillings, imagination may well shudder at the excesses of less sober folk. The *Victory*, when she heard the good news, fired salvos of artillery. But she was destined never again to carry Keppel into battle. The Government had committed him to the indignity of a trial because his work had not been completely successful. The same test, if universally applied, would bring to justice all artists whose pictures were less good than Sir Joshua's, all generals who fell short of the Duke of Marlborough, and all poets who suffered in comparison with Shakespeare. Keppel had no heart to work under such taskmasters, and stepped aside to make room for somebody else.

The *Victory's* new master was Sir Charles Hardy.

He came of a good old Dorset family that gave the fleet three famous admirals—Sir Thomas, Rooke's captain at Vigo Bay; Sir Charles himself; and Sir Thomas Masterman Hardy, Nelson's captain at Trafalgar. Sir Charles was cradled in the "'Fifteen," and distinguished himself in the "'Forty-five." When in command of the *Jersey*, of sixty guns, he engaged the *St. Esprit*, a seventy-four, fought her to a standstill, and drove her into Cadiz laden with dead and lacking her fore mast and bowsprit. Such single combats between ships of the line were of the rarest possible occurrence. When as successful as Hardy's, they brought in their train a rapid rise, comfortable billets, and quick promotion. Sir Charles served for a time as Governor of New York, and in 1759 had the supreme honour of serving as Hawke's second at Quiberon. Finally he was made head of Greenwich Hospital. Like his namesake, whom Nelson loved, he was one of the most famous governors. His portrait by Romney is one of the treasures of the Painted Hall. In those days the "Hospital" was crowded with inmates, and the blue coat of the Pensioners was as familiar to the people of London as the red coat of Chelsea to-day. Sir Charles had 2,350 men in his little kingdom, and one and all they adored him.

Sir Charles was a very different man from Keppel. Keppel, although at the head of his profession and not so young as he had been, was not old. But Sir Charles was his senior by ten years. Indeed, it is not altogether unfair to surmise that he hoped to be left undisturbed at Greenwich for the short remainder of his life. But at the call of his country he came to her assistance. He asked, of course, for the *Victory*, and hoisted his flag on board of her at Portsmouth.

The heraldry of the sea in the *Victory's* day might be a subject of extraordinary difficulty, to judge by

the number of mistakes that occur in pictures, contemporary and otherwise. The colours of a ship, as a matter of fact, were limited to three. Her country's flag was flown in the bows at a staff that stood erect on the bowsprit. This staff was called a jack-staff; but why jack no one knows. If the word means "little" and refers to the staff, then "Union Jack" is an absurd appellation, and "Union Flag" should be substituted. But if jack refers to King James I, who ordered the flag to be used, then the name is just as properly placed as James at the beginning of the Bible.

The second colour was the ancient or ensign, to signify the service of the ship. Nowadays there is only one such flag. But in the *Victory's* day things were different. The fleet was divided into three squadrons, corresponding to the right, centre, and left of an army. As these squadrons were more often than not in order of column, the terms *van*, *centre*, and *rear* were used. But the names were not very happily bestowed; for if a fleet sailing on one tack suddenly swung itself round on the other, the rear became the van, and the van became the rear. And if the fleet were to sail in line abreast, right, centre, and left would have been more appropriate. Still, there were three separate squadrons, and each squadron had its own ensign. The ensign was carried at the opposite end of the ship from the jack-staff; the ensign of the centre division of the fleet was a red flag, with the union in a canton at the upper corner next to the staff<sup>1</sup>; the ensign of the rear squadron was a blue flag with the union similarly placed. The ensign of the van squadron for a long time resembled the others in all but the ground colour, which was white. But when in the days of

<sup>1</sup> A *canton* in heraldry signifies a diminished fourth of the field.



Marlborough and Rooke we developed a settled habit of fighting the French, whose flag was pure white, the little union in the canton was found insufficient to distinguish friend from foe. The blood-red cross of St. George was accordingly added, so that in general design the white ensign differed from the other two.

The third device worn by a ship of the line was the cognizance of her commander. Admirals' flags were flown at the mast-head, the full admiral's colours at the main, the vice-admiral's at the fore, and the rear-admiral's at the mizzen. The flags themselves resembled ensigns, except that there was no union included. The red flag was wholly red. The blue flag was wholly blue. The white flag, like the white ensign, was charged with the cross of St. George. As the commander-in-chief had his station in the centre squadron, and the ships of the centre wore red ensigns, the red flag had precedence of the other two. The white flag came next in rank. For white was the colour of the leading squadron, and it was thought more honourable to command the van than bring up the rear. "Red, white, and blue" was the order of colour precedence.

In mediæval times, when ships had a single sail, the entire spread of canvas was used for the field of heraldic achievement. The Lord High Admiral in Crecy days had his main sail emblazoned with the gold leopards of England, passant gardant in pale, within a blue border powdered with fleurs-de-lis. Whenever he sailed he bore the impress and patent of his rank, pictorially significant. Yet to those who could read aright, the hoisting of the simple banner of St. George to the main topmast head of the *Victory* in 1779 was significant to the same degree. It showed that the flagship had received on board the admiral of highest rank in England. For the red

admiral was a creature known to entomologists only.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Charles Hardy needed all his experience in the coming campaign; for there was now an additional Power in arms against his country. Coaxed by France, nerved by Keppel's want of success at Ushant, and encouraged by British preoccupation in America, Spain was now resolved to wipe off old scores and avenge herself for injuries inflicted by Drake, Blake, Rooke, and Anson. Once more she sent her ships to sea, and threw in her lot with France.

Keppel had had a fleet of thirty ships, and been opposed by a similar number. Sir Charles Hardy's fleet was no larger than Keppel's. But the allies had seventy ships. Seventy ships against thirty. The odds were overwhelming. Who could cope with them? How should England be delivered?

The answer to these questions depended in chief on the ambition of the French. It has been said that they did not approve of a pitched battle unless there was something definite to be gained. What was their fleet of seventy for? What did they intend to do?

They intended an invasion of England, and had assembled fifty thousand horse and foot on the coast of Normandy. The fleet of seventy sail was to do the ferrying. Napoleon vowed at a later day that if only the allied fleet of France and Spain arrived in the English Channel, the British Islands were as good as occupied. He may have been right or he may have been wrong. But the allied fleet in 1805 did not succeed in reaching the Channel.

<sup>1</sup> Though the red flag and blue no longer exist, the white flag still survives. It serves now to distinguish the admiral from the vice-admiral and the rear. Thus it still floats at the main topmast of the *Victory*, because Portsmouth is an admiral's command.

In 1779, on the other hand, the allied fleet did succeed in reaching the Channel; reached it in such overwhelming strength that braggarts at Boulogne might be forgiven for boasting. In England, "Where would the enemy land?" was the question on every man's lips. All that could be done was to organize transport for the removal inland of coast-dwellers, and to dispose of farm produce and live stock so that their capture might not help the invader. The train-bands were called out; bodies of horsemen rode along the coast; beacons were piled up ready for lighting; and watchmen were stationed on every church-tower overlooking the Channel. A crisis had come in England's fate, and the crisis found her wholly unprepared. Under similar circumstances, the Romans would have appointed a dictator and thrust all their responsibilities on the shoulders of a single man. The Ministry subconsciously had done the same thing. Between England and the fifty thousand foemen with their escort of seventy ships was the admiral in the *Victory*, with his white flag at the main.

What would the "dictator" do?

There were captains serving under Hardy whose names are household words—names redolent of conquest, names like the breath of daring—John Jervis of the *Foudroyant* and Adam Duncan of the *Monarch*. What advice would these men have given the admiral, if their advice had been asked? When Luther was on his way to Worms, his best friends besought him to return. But he answered, "If there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles upon its roofs, yet would I on." Jervis and Duncan were cast in the same mould. "Die fighting! Sell your life dearly! At least, be game to the last!" Such would have been their counsel. And there is no doubt that the advice would have commended itself to all

the manhood of the fleet. In similar circumstances Nelson would have fought. He would have divided his ships into two squadrons—himself in the one, everyone else in the other. Then while his numbers attacked the French, he would have fought the Dons alone. For, after all, England was in dire peril, and something had to be done.

But Sir Charles Hardy was old, and personal ambition was dead within him. Though brave hearts on board the *Victory* urged him to fall upon the enemy and smite them hip and thigh, he turned a deaf ear and doggedly stuck to the method he preferred. He took a leaf out of the book of the old Roman general Fabius, who by dalliance saved the republic. When the enemy prepared to do their worst, he appeared opportunely to thwart them. As in duty bound, they made ready to close, and he instantly beat a retreat. What was to prevent the allied squadron from following as fast as they could? In theory, nothing; in practice, much. For example, when in the whole of its history had the British fleet run away? It was clean contrary to their principles. Impetuosity in tackling any odds was just that feature of England's sea-policy which the French persistently criticized. And hence the natural doubt in their minds as to whether the Britons were retreating at all. Was it not far more probable that they were trying to lure their invaders into an ambushade? No one could state with any certainty how many ships the English had at their disposal. How many were there behind the next headland? These thirty odd were clearly a detachment—a squadron of observation. They were hastening, perhaps, to join the main body, which was probably not far off. Caution! patience! It would be necessary to discover what the enemy were up to.

Another alternative. As the English had tempor-

arily disappeared, why not ferry across the Channel the army of fifty thousand men? Madness! mid-summer madness! Sir Charles Hardy and his fleet might be gone. But how far? That was the problem. In headlong flight to the sandbanks of the Thames, or behind the deceptive slope of the horizon? Which was the likelier supposition? Who would send defenceless transports to sea, when the English, hidden like crouching panthers, only waited the moment to reveal their hiding-place and pounce upon their prey?

There was only one thing that could render invasion possible: the invaders must secure command of the sea. And command of the sea can only be gained by ridding yourself of competitors. Fight them. Leap upon them and stamp them dead, or dispose of them in some other manner equally efficacious. If the English in 1779 had stayed in harbour as the Russians did in their war with Japan, the allies could then have blockaded them and carried their policy into effect.

But the English did not stay in harbour. They stayed nowhere. They moved about, to the discomfiture of their foes. Fight? By no means. Rather than fight, retire in haste. "A fleet in being." Here to-day, gone to-morrow; too weak to fight, too strong to be ignored. An inscrutable enigma to its enemies. The French could do nothing, absolutely nothing. They tried for a season to look busy and feel busy. Then they hurried disconsolately homewards. And one of the gravest crises through which England has ever passed ended like a summer thunderstorm.

It is astonishing how quickly the ordinary man recovers from a terrible scare. At one moment his limbs quake, the marrow melts in his bones, and he hastens to confess his sins. The very next minute he is full of assurance, wishes all men were as brave

as himself, ridicules his neighbour, and puffs out his chest. So in 1779. The moment the allies were really gone, all England was brave and lion-hearted. People began to discuss the late campaign and the mode in which it was conducted. There was, of course, a considerable amount of windy talk. But all were agreed on one point—Sir Charles Hardy had botched things hopelessly. The part he had chosen to play was the part of a poltroon. His behaviour was most reprehensible. Here were a swarm of alien ships defiling English waters and literally crying aloud for punishment. And Sir Charles Hardy had neither the wit nor the pluck to chastise them. What a disgrace! How lowering to the repute of British sailors, who up till now had always been famous for pluck and hardihood! The merchants of London and meaner cities shook the dust off their feet upon the Admiral. They were sorry that truth should compel them to acknowledge him as any countryman of theirs.

And as, when fear is removed, sound common sense returns, we must hold the average man to be right in the main. The sea is a queen whose hand is sought. There may be many rivals and aspirants. But she acknowledges one master; and when he comes, like Ulysses at Ithaca he must make short work of the suitors, however many they be. And if he is unable to do this, then he is unfit to name himself master at all. Thus it has ever been in the days of England's lordship: Drake attacking the Spanish Empire in the might of its dominion with three ships or possibly four; Grenville fighting with odds of fifty to one against him; Blake accepting battle at Portland with twelve ships of his own to ninety of the Dutch; Nelson offering with a dozen sail to destroy all the navies of the Baltic. Every Englishman in his blood knows that these men were

right. First annihilate the enemy's fleet, and the ocean world is won.

And yet, although everyone has forgotten Sir Charles Hardy's campaign, although his very name has been swallowed up in the more familiar ring of his kinsman's, the *Victory*, if she could speak, would have tales to tell, and would probably speak with becoming enthusiasm of the way he tricked his foes.<sup>1</sup>

The next great admiral who flew his flag in the *Victory*—blue at the mizzen—was Richard Kempenfelt, a man of modest and unassuming disposition, but of reputation quite unexampled in Service circles and clubs. There was not a naval officer who did not envy him his consummate grasp of everything relating to his profession. If some expert produced a learned treatise on ballistics, "he knew almost as much about gunnery as Kempenfelt." If some commander was almost infallible as to the right course to pursue in a gale, "he was almost as good a seaman as Kempenfelt." Kempenfelt, in a word, exemplified the "brains" of the Navy. Cowper in his funeral dirge describes him as dying with a pen between his fingers. The attitude was certainly characteristic. Kempenfelt could handle the sword when occasion arose. But primarily he was a law-giver. Many of his reforms were of far-reaching importance. But one exceeded all the rest in magnitude. Kempenfelt taught the *Victory* how to speak.

A ship, of course, was not at any time wholly tongue-tied or dumb. She could plunge into battle with all her guns speaking. And if this did not convey her meaning as clearly as a message, then the other ships, like the adder, were purposely stopping their ears. With this form of address Drake

<sup>1</sup> After the campaign of 1779 the *Victory* returned to Portsmouth to be "coppered." This was not, as some of the wits suggested, to enable her to run away more quickly!

exhorted his men when the Spaniards came into the Channel. Later on, in Dutch war days, need was felt for more explicit speech, and a code of signals was adopted. This was at first of an elementary description. Any evolution or battle-plan whose usefulness was proved by long-established custom had a flag assigned to it. Thus when the admiral required his whole line to swing round as the Frenchman deployed his ships at Ushant, he hoisted a union flag at the foretop and a union flag at the mizzen. If he wanted the entire fleet to heave to, a yellow flag at the mizzen-top; if he was ready for battle and desired all ships to begin, a red flag at the fore. In this mode there were many messages he could send, so long as they were messages that had been sent before. The Dutch flag, the flag striped yellow and white, the red and white flag, the chequered blue and yellow, the white flag with a red cross, the flag striped white and blue, all had their own peculiar and unalterable significance. The system was a good one, and often worked well. It was good enough for Hawke at Quiberon and Anson at Finisterre. But Kempenfelt would have none of it. The way he looked at things was this. "Suppose," said he, "that I want to signal something which has not been prearranged, what then? I can do nothing. I am helpless. We don't want the *Victory* to have a book of recipes with a score or two of time-honoured dishes. With no better equipment than this, she will know as much about eloquence as a cook. The *Victory* must be made to speak."

So Kempenfelt devised a medium of thought and a vehicle of expression. Flags had been gradually growing more numerous. He began by reducing the number. Not a hundred, nor sixty, nor forty, nor twenty, but twelve were all that he required. Ten of them were to stand for the ten digits, and the other two were to be repeating flags, so that



there should be no confusion when the same number was used more than once. Thus a scale of notation was established, and it merely remained to number the letters of the alphabet and as many words from the dictionary as were likely to be required.

The most famous signal that the *Victory* ever hoisted ran in the new language as follows: "253, 269, 863, 261, 471, 958, 220, 370, 4, 21, 19, 24" ("England expects that every man will do his D—U—T—Y"). "England," "every," and "expects" being close together in the vocabulary, were neighbours, you see, in the numerical code—253, 261, and 269. "Duty," it is strange to think, was the one word that had to be spelled.<sup>1</sup> No one had foreseen the need of numbering a virtue so homely and commonplace. But Nelson gave the sound a new significance, and died with it upon his lips.

It was while Kempenfelt had his flag in her that the *Victory* passed one of the most joyful and exhilarating days in her career; to be precise, December 13, 1781. The French were taking a big expedition to the West Indies, which they were capturing island by island as their share in the spoils of the war. They had a score of battleships and innumerable transports. In fact, they were actually doing on this occasion what they had not dared to do in the Channel. They were conducting ships full of soldiers over an uncommanded sea. Kempenfelt, who had a little squadron of observation, amounting to twelve ships, discovered this expedition to the south of Ushant and swept it out of existence. He did not touch the French battleships. His inferiority was so marked that the definite success which he was determined to achieve would by direct assault have been hazarded. He had a method incomparably superior. For Fortune had come to his assistance, as

<sup>1</sup> See also below p. 213 and note.

she often does when men are bold and woo her roughly enough. Kempenfelt had the "weather-gage." This term, which really means nothing more than "nearer the wind than the enemy," will be easily understood if it be thought of as superior speed. Kempenfelt, using his superior speed, flung himself not upon the French fleet but upon their convoy, the lumbering, slow-gaited, helpless troopships. Prize after prize was taken. Hundreds and thousands of soldiers were captured. And those that had the good fortune to escape were purposely left untouched in order to serve as a rampart or wall to shield Kempenfelt's force from the enemy's battle-ships. They, poor fools, could not fire a gun without hurting those, and only those, whom they had been sent to sea to protect. For England the affair was a brilliant exploit, purchased at trifling cost. Fifteen prizes were lugged into Plymouth. Two French vessels only reached America. The remnant, with drooping colours, slunk back into Brest like dogs that have been well whipped.

In a war that had been going unexpectedly ill, the achievement was certainly something to be proud of. It was also the first real victory that the *Victory* had won. But it did not of itself suffice to bring hostilities to a close.

Gibraltar had been besieged since the beginning of the war, and was still besieged. Years of endurance had diminished its resources. Its strength was momentarily ebbing. To rescue the plucky garrison before it was too late was a first claim upon the national honour. The Government, therefore, hastened the preparations for a relief expedition, and appointed as Commander-in-Chief Admiral Lord Howe.

His task was described by the best-informed critics as next to impossible. For he was expected to

perform what the French had twice attempted and twice failed to accomplish. He was asked to conduct troopships and cornships to a definite destination, with the enemy's fleet at sea. To a definite destination! When the French left Brest for the West Indies they had the whole of the Atlantic to screen them, and all the fogs of December. And no one knew out of fifty islands which they were going to. It required a man of Kempenfelt's talents to discover them at all. When they invaded the Channel, they had the whole of the southern coast of England in which to choose a landing-place. Lord Howe was far less happily circumstanced. He had no choice of destination. No other place but Gibraltar would serve his turn. The French and Spanish forces were already there. They surrounded Gibraltar by land and sea. All they had to do was to wait. And then, when the mad expedition arrived, disperse it after the manner of Kempenfelt.

The project was in theory a hopeless one, and theory is often less hopeless than practice. Yet Lord Howe never dreamed of declining it or begging to be excused. He was a man who required a desperate situation to work him up to his best effort. So cool, so calm, so collected, he was most dangerous at the particular point where other brave men are defeated. A man of deep integrity and high ideals, he was respected by his officers and worshipped by his men. On the present occasion he had one request to present—a request that was immediately granted. He asked to be allowed to hoist his flag<sup>1</sup> on board of the *Victory*.

The outward journey passed without incident. When the Strait was reached, Lord Howe put all his helpless ships in front of his array, so that, if the foe tried to spring on them as Kempenfelt had sprung,

<sup>1</sup> Blue at the main.

he himself might spring on the springers. For himself, he prayed that at least they would move, even if it was to attack him: for until they came out of Gibraltar Bay he could not possibly go in; and so long as they stayed in Gibraltar Bay he could not force them out. The French and Spaniards, however, were ably led, and refused to move an inch.

What next? The wind and tide ran eastward through the Strait, and Howe with his immense following swept through, swept on, swept past, and disappeared. The towering mass of rock shut him out from view. He was simply not to be seen. He might have gone to Naples, or Athens, or Genoa, or Constantinople. There was not a port in the Mediterranean which he might not reasonably be visiting. But why should he go past at all? Did he think to make a counter-attack on Toulon or Barcelona? To the allies Lord Howe's strange peregrinations seemed not unlike those of the famous John Gilpin. Immense preparations had been completed, and when the destination was reached not a moment's stop was made. The mad cavalcade dashed by at full speed. What in the name of conscience was going on? The allies were only able to guess; and as they guessed, their own situation began to grow uncomfortable. The English, perhaps, had gone no farther than the back of the rock. Perhaps they were plotting even now their latest devilry. Fire-ships! They were fond of fire-ships. It was certainly impossible to sit still doing nothing. Besides, to stay cooped up in port with the enemy at sea was, by general admission, the height of folly.

So the allies ventured out of Gibraltar Bay. The moment they did so they were caught by the wind and clutched by the tide. Incapable of offering resistance to such powers as these, they were carried ignominiously past Lord Howe and past his convoy

of troopships. What chuckling there must have been in the English ships as they watched the spectacle and realized how completely Lord Howe's clever ruse had succeeded! The *Victory* now led her consorts into Gibraltar Bay, and the worst was over. The store-ships unloaded their stock of provisions. The besieged regaled themselves on bread and meat, which for months they had tasted only in their dreams. And lest they should be disturbed, the *Victory* and the rest of the battle-fleet drew themselves up in serried phalanx across the mouth of the bay. When the last barrel of flour had been landed and the last soldier disembarked, it was Lord Howe's business to guide his cavalcade, in the face of the enemy, back through the narrow defile.

The Strait of Gibraltar is an irregular parallelogram, narrowing at its eastern end to nine miles between Gibraltar and Ceuta, and widening at its western end to thirty miles between Cape Trafalgar and Cape Spartel. Lord Howe, with his battleships, moved along the African side, and hove to off Cape Spartel. He thus issued a challenge to the allied fleet, who outnumbered him by forty-six to thirty-four; and he left a clear road round Cape Trafalgar for his non-combatant vessels to retreat. Scarcely were these dispositions made when the wind, which till now had been favourable, played him false and deserted to the enemy. He had chosen the southern side of the Strait. The wind swung round to the north.

But though fortune gave the allies the windward position, they did not altogether appreciate the gift. The windward position conferred certain benefits and entailed certain responsibilities. It gave its possessor certain powers over his adversary—power to attack when and how he pleased, power to torment the fleet to leeward as a cat torments a mouse. But to bring about the actual conflict it

was necessary to approach the foe; and to do this a fleet in line ahead was obliged for a while to abandon its formation and "bear up," or run off the wind. While doing so, the whole array of ships changed from line of column, their fighting formation, to "line abreast," with broadside to broadside. And in this position by firing their guns they could only injure themselves. The leeward fleet, retaining the line ahead, was free meanwhile to give all its attention to gunnery and hammer its opponents, or even blow them out of the water if there was time to do so before they reached a position agreeable to themselves and shifted once more into line ahead, to take their part in the battle.

The English preferred the windward berth, in spite of its obvious drawbacks. But the French preferred the leeward position, and used it with great effect in their two most successful encounters with the English, Grenada and Beachy Head. They liked to await the approach of their foes and open at farthest possible range their assault upon sails and rigging. These were their targets, whatever the conditions of battle. At long range they were the only parts of a ship that were really vulnerable. The damage inflicted on the approaching windward fleet by the more or less stationary leeward was sometimes sufficient of itself to put a period to the strife.

It was on October 20th that the Battle of Cape Spartel was fought—the place and date in singular proximity to the date and place of Trafalgar. The two fleets were advancing on the starboard tack—that is, in a westerly direction. It is said by officers of standing who were present that the line ahead on this particular battlefield found its finest exemplification. Seen from a distance, the vessels looked like model craft that some human hand had placed upon a sheet. They were separated one from another by

intervals so regular and exact that none more accurate could have been measured by a two-foot rule. And the opposing lines were planted as straight as rows of tulips in a Dutch garden.

Lord Howe always declared that he liked a battle to begin early in the morning—say immediately after breakfast—so as to make sure of seeing it finished. The allied fleet, however, did not bear up until nearly sunset. Even so, with the wind in their favour and superior strength they had a magnificent opportunity. They resolved to push home their attack, not all along the line but on the British rear or right wing. The scheme was excellent. It was the scheme attempted by Rodney at Martinique. It was the scheme perfected by Nelson in his greatest battle. While they rained their blows on the British right, their own van was to distract attention by a feint on the British left.

As the enemy came down to the attack, Lord Howe gave the *Victory* her orders. Not a shot was to be fired, not a blow delivered, until the buttons on the Frenchmen's coats could be seen. So the gunners stood by their pieces, waiting and watching. But they waited and watched in vain. The allies might come to close quarters in the rear, and at least make a similar pretence in the van. But in the centre, opposite Lord Howe himself, they contented themselves with a game of long bowls. The Frenchmen's buttons would not reveal themselves, and on the *Victory's* lower deck but one gun was fired, and that by accident.

In his heart of hearts Lord Howe would have preferred to turn upon his assailants and belabour them. Though it was extremely difficult to assume the offensive from the leeward berth, he, if anyone, could have managed it. It is said that when the enemy attacked his right and held off from his centre



he proposed to fling his disengaged squadron on the other tack and, gaining the wind of the enemy's rear, discomfit them by an assault upon both sides. It was the British game, and in his methods Lord Howe was typically British. But from the *Victory's* poop he saw that his own right wing could take care of itself. And after all, his work was accomplished when Gibraltar was relieved. With a fleet so much inferior to the foe, it would have been foolish to risk by tactics what he had won by strategy.

So the battle proceeded in the French mode with a partial or rearguard action. But as the fleets drew side by side into the darkening west, the sun dropped into the waves and put an end to the conflict. Throughout the night Lord Howe was careful to maintain his position. But the French made no effort to keep their place, and by daylight had dropped astern. To them a naval battle was still only justifiable if there was something tangible to be gained. And what was there to be gained now that Gibraltar was relieved? Clearly, nothing. Very good; then why fight? They had stood up to the English and exchanged shots. Honour was satisfied.

The relief of Gibraltar was the last affair in which the *Victory* participated during the war of American Independence. She might have seen bloodier work if it had been her lot to cross the Atlantic and carry Lord Rodney's flag. As leader of England's main fleet, at home and in the Mediterranean, she had seen as much service as she could reasonably expect to crowd into five short years. By all men her qualities were loudly praised. Just before the Battle of Cape Spartel, in clearing the strait she outsailed many ships that had top-gallants set, with her main top-sail still upon the cap. Already she had a fighting experience that many less fortunate ships might have envied. But her great days were still to come.



## CHAPTER IX

### MORE CAMPAIGNING

*Your glorious standard launch again  
To match another foe!  
And sweep through the deep  
While the stormy winds do blow.*

CAMPBELL.

TEN years after the relief of Gibraltar, when abbé and duke and marquis forsook the umbrageous walks of fair Versailles, where they had regaled themselves with music and laughter, oblivious of the groaning peasants at their gate; when the Bourbon lilies were trailed in the dust and the tri-colour streamed through the streets; when kindly Louis with his heavy face atoned for the blunders of his reign by his manly bearing on the scaffold; when the acorn of liberty was planted and, being watered with blood, sprang up a monstrous growth with "Death to Tyrants!" written on its leaves; when Danton stamped with his foot upon the ground and warriors sprang up ready armed; when war spread from Paris to Vienna, from Vienna to Brussels, from Brussels to Berlin, from Berlin to London, and from London to Naples—then the *Victory* became an Anti-Jacobin.

She now carried the flag—red at the fore—of Admiral Lord Hood. Lord Hood was a commander of sound judgment, ripe experience, and incomparable parts. In the black days of the American War no one had done more than he to banish the clouds

of darkness and despair. With the weight of past defeats burdening the hearts of his officers and the courage of his men, with inadequate supplies of consumable stores and with heavy odds against him, he had turned the ablest admiral of France out of a chosen position, and occupied it himself with an insouciance that Drake or Dundonald might have envied, and which it is certain that neither could have surpassed. His greatest triumph had been gained in the Battle of the Saints, when his magnificent services as Rodney's second had raised him to a well-earned position in the peerage.

Lord Hood left England in May 1793. With him went a fleet of twenty-one ships, most notable among them (though men knew it not) the *Agamemnon* of sixty-four guns. The *Agamemnon* carried the pendant of Horatio Nelson, hitherto a frigate-captain, now in his first battleship; the adoring disciple of Admiral Lord Hood, whose conduct he intended to make the model of his own. Early in June he rowed across to pay his respects to the commander-in-chief in the *Victory*. The *Victory* was already known to him. She had been lying in the river at Chatham when first he went to sea. But the present visit was his first formal introduction. As he came aboard and recognized the strength and beauty of her lines he whispered a prayer that the day should come when he too might hope to hoist his flag in her.

Lord Hood arrived in the Mediterranean at a propitious moment, when thousands of Frenchmen, sickened by Jacobin excesses, reawakened their loyalty to the tottering throne of France. And in no town were such men so numerous as in Toulon, after Brest the greatest naval base in the country. By the loyal Toulonese, negotiations were opened with Lord Hood, who agreed to furnish help if the town and port were handed over to him. The

conditions were exacting; but the opposition of the Republican minority was overcome and the *Victory* entered the harbour, followed not only by the English sail of the line, but by seventeen Spanish men-of-war and numerous frigates, supply ships, and sloops. "What an event!" wrote Nelson. "That the strongest place in Europe should be given up without firing a shot! It is not to be credited."

The British occupation was not allowed to go very long unchallenged. The revolutionary armies gathered from all sides in daily increasing hordes. They were fired by enthusiasm. The rescue of the violated land of France was a rallying-cry that any general might have envied. But the commander-in-chief was by profession an artist, who in the constitutional earthquake had discarded his palette for a uniform and his maulstick for a sword. The majority of his officers had received no better training than their chief. Behind the walls they were opposed by a medley of all nations whom the untiring industry of Lord Hood had with difficulty collected. These were hardly sufficient to garrison the forts or man the battlements. But they were stiffened with a nucleus of Englishmen, and were led by English officers. The days and weeks slipped slowly by; but the revolutionary armies made no sort of progress in their efforts to reduce the town.

And then among new arrivals came the Man of Destiny to lay the foundation of his fame, his fortune, and his boundless military renown. At this time Napoleon was a young man of twenty-four, eleven years Nelson's junior. He was short and slight. His clothes were threadbare. His hair was lank. There were black rings round his eyes. He was thin. He was poor. He was unkempt. But there was nothing in all this to belittle him in the eyes of his fellows. And from the very first he proved himself a power

to be reckoned with. He surveyed the place, and quickly formed an opinion. The English fleet, he decided, must be ejected. Then, and not till then, would the city be taken. The place was too strong to be carried by assault; and with British ships at the harbour's mouth starvation was out of the question. Store-ships could come and go without challenge. Bread could be brought, and meat and wine; powder and guns and shot. Toulon, with the British Navy within, was impregnable from without. But once the Navy of England were expelled, the walls of the town would fall flat.

No special genius, perhaps, was required to grasp all this. What Napoleon said had already been said days before he arrived: it was patent to all who had eyes to see. But the others wrung their hands, and Napoleon racked his brain. The English must be expelled. How was the thing to be done? Only by artillery. He himself was an artillery officer. Therefore the expulsion of the English was a task specially reserved by Providence for himself. He began at the beginning. He inspected the guns, and set them in order. The supply being insufficient, he collected others. He seemed to know exactly where to find them. There were two he had seen in such a place; the whereabouts of three others he had learned from a reliable authority and noted down in his book. Presently he had a regular park of artillery. Then he took the same pains with his powder, ammunition, and all other accessories. And meanwhile he trained his gunners and inspired them with his own enthusiasm. He was never out of the batteries. He slept on the parapet, with a cloak rolled under his head. A born organizer, he left nothing to others, and toiled without intermission. "I have known the limits of my legs," he said. "I have known the limits of my eyes. I have never known the limits of my work."

Toulon is composed of two harbours, an outer and an inner. The outer is approached from the Mediterranean. It is much the larger of the two, and has an entrance nearly three miles in width. From this great basin the inner haven is approached through an opening only half a mile wide. This narrow passage is flanked by a promontory on either hand. As the *Victory* entered the inner harbour, she had the greater promontory on her left and the lesser on her right. Behind the lesser lay Toulon itself. Behind the greater the haven proper spread out in an ample fold, capable of accommodating a fleet twice as large as that which Lord Hood had brought. The big promontory was christened by the sailors "Little Gibraltar." They were quick to see its importance, and threw up such defences as they could.

It was on "Little Gibraltar" that the eye of Napoleon settled. "Little Gibraltar" was the key to the situation. Give him that, and his guns would make the harbour uninhabitable. He began to erect a bastion. The English opened fire, and slew his gunners to the last man. Napoleon christened his bastion "The Battery of the Fearless," and went on with his work. The chivalry of Frenchmen mounted on higher wings as they saw their little leader expose himself with such matchless intrepidity. Let the English fire as they might, the "Battery" never wanted brave men once the christening was done. At last the coping-stone was reached and, as the French works grew, the hasty arrangements of the English proved less and less equal to the demands that were made upon them. So at last "Little Gibraltar" was gained, and the guns of Napoleon's artillery park were turned upon the harbour.

For the English this was the end. It was impossible to retain their position any longer. Not the greatest

vessel afloat could deal with heavy land ordnance. Not even the *Victory*. Admiral Mahan in *Naval Strategy* says, "A ship can no more stand up against a fort costing the same money than the fort could run a race with the ship." And what is true of to-day was just as true then. Once Toulon harbour was controlled from the land, it was no place for English ships. Lord Hood gave instant orders for its abandonment.

Unfortunately, at this critical hour he had overmuch to do. If he had simply been making war upon France he would have destroyed every ship in the harbour. But his task was not quite so straightforward as that. He had to rescue the loyal Toulonese from the packs of human wolves that barked and bayed for blood. To this humane work he devoted nearly all his energies; and what he accomplished falls little short of the miraculous. He carried off no less than 14,877 souls. But even this figure fell short of the total. Many were left to pay with their lives the penalty of being loyal to the old régime. And in the hands of the victorious regicides Lord Hood was obliged to leave a part of the fleet, which under luckier stars might have been accounted for completely.

But the destruction he wrought was tremendous. When he entered Toulon he had found thirty-one ships of the line—a fleet, be it noted, almost as large as that which fought Napoleon's last sea-fight at Trafalgar. And he disposed of no less than thirteen. Most of these he destroyed by fire, and the sight of the conflagration was long remembered by those who saw it. Napoleon referred to it at St. Helena, and described vividly his own feelings as he watched the destruction of ship after ship. The flames, he said, leapt from the ports and blazed along the bulwarks. They ran up the shrouds, outlining the

masts and yards and stays, painting in living crimson and rose, against a background of smoke and inky sky, the picture of man's noblest handiwork. It was a spectacle to touch the heart even of a bloodthirsty Jacobin.

In addition to those he burned, and in addition to a dozen frigates, Lord Hood carried off four battle-ships as prizes. One of these, the *Commerce de Marseille*, was the largest ship afloat. When she reached home there was no dock at Portsmouth that would hold her. Nelson wrote in a letter home: "The *Commerce de Marseille* has seventeen ports on each deck. The *Victory* looks nothing to her." But to Lord Hood the result was unsatisfactory. If he had been a free agent, he would on his arrival at Toulon have removed the entire French fleet to a place of safety; but that was not the way to ingratiate himself with those whom he had come to befriend. He was obliged to postpone the holocaust until he was certain that failure to burn the ships would place them in the hands of those who were hostile not only to himself but to the loyalists as well. And when the moment came, it was all too short, and compelled him to relinquish eighteen sail of the line, a fleet quite formidable enough to compete with him for dominion over the Mediterranean.

The *Victory* shared in all the subsequent successes of Lord Hood, and especially in the conquest of Corsica. Many of her seamen were at Nelson's side when he captured Bastia and Calvi. But Lord Hood's tenure of office proved all too short. In November 1794, within a twelvemonth of the evacuation of Toulon, he returned to England, and the *Victory* went with him. His departure was lamented by all who had served under him. It was more to be regretted, perhaps, than the sincerest of them supposed.

A turning-point had been reached in the history

of Europe. The star of Napoleon that with hazy twinkling had appeared above the horizon at Toulon was gradually mounting higher and higher in the firmament and compelling the attention of men. The shores of the Mediterranean were to witness a new revelation. How important that Britain's fleet should be in safe hands! Lord Hood was gone. Who was to take his place? Nelson had not the requisite seniority. He was there. He was ready. We may well believe that, had the power been put into his hands, he would have ruined Napoleon's plans in 1795 as completely as he ruined them in 1798. But he was still in his first battleship. Eleven years older than the Corsican, he was not even a rear-admiral. There had been no upheaval in England that set an artist in the place of a field-marshal and raised a petty officer to the command of a ship. Nelson's time was coming, but was not yet. And meanwhile the place of Lord Hood was temporarily filled by his second in command, Admiral Hotham.

"The management of a private ship and a fleet," wrote Kempenfelt in one of those wise letters of his, "are as different from each other as the exercising of a firelock and the conducting of an army." Hotham was an ideal captain. But he could not bring himself to accept for a squadron the risks which he cheerfully accepted for a single ship. He dared not "put it to the touch to win or lose it all." Now, round the shores of the Mediterranean were many Powers who waited the event. If England looked like holding the Mediterranean as she had held it in the days of Boscawen and Rooke, then they were prepared with their offers of help and their assurances of good will. If, on the other hand, England played a feeble or uncertain part, then they were ready enough to transfer their affections and hail the new ascendancy of France.



Everything, then, rested with Admiral Hotham. The eyes of the world were fastened on him to see what he would do.

His first meeting with the Toulon fleet took place in the *Victory's* absence. The encounter was in no sense epoch-making, and the *Victory* cannot be said to have missed very much. She was back again in May 1795, bearing at her mizzen topmast the blue flag of Admiral Man. Her return was opportunely timed. Before Napoleon came upon the stage, fortune resolved in a magnanimous way to give Admiral Hotham a second chance. Would he take it? Would he seize it as Hawke on a similar occasion? Would he use it as Blake had done? Or would he let the opportunity fall from his grasp and himself fade into the land of shadows, little better than the shadow of a shade?<sup>1</sup>

Hotham's second battle was fought not very far from Toulon. It is generally referred to as the Battle of Hyères, from the islands of that name in the neighbourhood. It was before four o'clock on a July morning when the French were sighted. The weather had been wild throughout the night, and one or two ships in the British array had split their topsails and had to bend new canvas before they could participate in the day's proceedings. As morning dawned the gale abated somewhat, but the wind continued high, and there was considerable swell. The French were to leeward and running north on the port tack. Hopes of a decisive battle animated the fighting spirit in the British fleet, and the possibilities of a great victory were discussed.

Hotham consumed a long time in dressing his line and amending it to his own satisfaction. But at last

<sup>1</sup> The fact should be noted for what it is worth that Hotham was the only admiral who, having the power, did not choose the *Victory* for his flag.

he gave the order to chase. The ships carried all the sail they were able to bear, the breeze remaining fresh. But as the day wore on and the sun broke through the clouds, the wind fell light. By noon the British fleet was in touch with the foe. In touch. No more. The French fleet, which numbered twenty-three ships, streamed away to the north towards its own coast. The British fleet, which almost exactly equalled it in numbers, stretched out in a line astern. And there was a slight overlap. The leading ships of the English were to windward of, and parallel to, the rearmost ships of the French. The French fleet may be thought of as a cobra twisting along, and the English fleet as a mongoose biting the cobra's tail. Would the cobra turn and fight, or would it wrest its long sinuous body away, leaving the tip of its tail in its adversary's mouth?

The leading ship of the English line was the *Victory* herself. Close on her tracks came the *Culloden*, Captain Troubridge, and the *Agamemnon*, Captain Nelson. The *Cumberland* and one or two other ships were also well to the fore. But the *Victory* was foremost. She ran out her guns to open the ball: and as she did so, there came a change of wind. The breeze, which till that moment had been constant from south-west, now swung round to the north, giving the enemy an initial advantage. For the ships paid off on the new tack, and as they did so the three sternmost vessels of the French line were enabled to bring all their broadsides to bear upon the leading ship of the English. Thus the fight began in real earnest, and the *Victory* found the odds against her. But her companions hastened to bring her relief, and a characteristic battle on a miniature scale ensued.

The French this time had not so much as the flimsiest pretext to justify a battle! As usual, they aimed at the sails and rigging of their opponents,

with intent to put them temporarily out of action. The *Victory* soon received a shot that severed the bolt-rope on the weather leech of her fore topsail. This imperilled the life of the canvas, which threatened every minute to split. Mr. Midshipman Hoskins, however, with commendable zeal and bravery, swarmed along the yard, and lowering himself by the reef-tackle, stoppered the bolt-rope and saved the sail. But the hail of scrap-iron continued. The *Culloden* lost her main topmast. The *Victory* had her rigging cut to pieces and her sails in time torn to shreds. Finally, like the *Culloden*, she also lost a limb. Her fore topsail yard was shorn away.

But this was the measure of the French success.

The *Victory* and the *Culloden* may have been hurt up aloft, but they had played the game as they understood it; and the *Alcide*, the last ship in the French line, hauled her flag down and surrendered. Fired by the reality of this success, other British ships strained every sinew to get into the firing line. It was obvious that more than one of the French ships had suffered quite as severely as the *Alcide*. It remained to cling to the retreating foe in true British bull-dog fashion and force the French commander for very shame to turn and fight to the death.

It was at this moment, a critical, a crucial moment in the history of Europe, that Hotham hoisted a signal to his mast-head:—

“The whole fleet will now retire!”

Everyone knows how Nelson treated a similar signal at the Battle of Copenhagen. But at Copenhagen he had a fleet at his disposal, an independent fleet. It is impossible for captains singly to defy their commander-in-chief. The *Cumberland*, it is true, pretended not to see. But the *Victory* saw only too well and felt it her duty to hoist the *Cumberland's* distinguishing pendant and

force her to obey commands. So the affair ended.

"Had the British fleet," said an officer of the *Victory*, "only put their heads the same way as the enemy's and stood inshore, the whole of the French line might have been cut off from the land, taken, or destroyed." "Thus," wrote Nelson, "has ended our second meeting with these gentry. In the forenoon we had every prospect of taking every ship in the fleet; and at noon it was almost certain we should have had the six near ships. The French admiral, I am sure, is not a wise man, nor an officer; he was undetermined whether to fight or run away: however, I must do him the justice to say he took the wisest step at last."

But the retreat of the French brought no honour to England and no renown to Admiral Hotham. Nor were there any laurels to be snatched from the fate of the French *Alcide*. She caught fire, and the flames were fed by the wreckage of her upper works. Hotter and redder grew the blaze, and the English boats were sent in haste to rescue their enemies. The fire glowed through the gun-ports and the heart of it was like a roaring blast furnace. There could be but one end. Before half of the unhappy men on board stood any chance of rescue, the ship blew up with a loud explosion that seemed to shake the very vault of heaven. Such was the fate of the *Cæsar* at the Saints, of the *San Domingo* at Rodney's moonlight battle, and of the *Orient* at the Nile. The flames reached the powder magazine while much of the wooden wall remained intact. Once a British flagship was destroyed by fire in battle—the *Royal James*, flagship of Lord Sandwich, at the Battle of Solebay. On that occasion the vessel burned slowly and surely and steadily; the crest of fire sank lower and lower, down to the water-line.

There was no explosion.

The *Royal James*, in the fight she had made, had used every grain of her powder.

To turn from Hotham's little affair at Hyères to Napoleon's first Italian campaign is to turn from a candle to an arc-lamp, from a rattle to a brass band, from a daub to a masterpiece. The builder of the "Battery of the Fearless" had his head full of vaster plans. With a mind broad enough to grasp the whole of Europe in its purview, with a faculty for instant decision and an iron will, with an imaginative eloquence to fire his soldiers' hearts, and with a knowledge of the elemental truths underlying the arts of war that would have done credit to the oldest field-marshal, this young general of twenty-six accomplished in twelve months more than all the legions of Louis XIV accomplished in twelve years. The world was at his feet. The sceptre of sovereignty was his for the picking up.

It was Hotham, and Hotham alone, who could have thwarted him. Hotham and Napoleon—Napoleon and Hotham. The conjunction to-day seems fantastic. It was not fantastic then. First to destroy the Toulon fleet, and next to prevent the invasion of Italy. These were the things that Hotham might have done. These were the things that Hotham failed to do. Napoleon's occupation of the Italian peninsula was as fateful to England as his occupation of "Little Gibraltar." The one rendered Toulon harbour untenable, the other the Mediterranean. At Toulon the Spaniards had fought side by side with the English. Then came Hotham's battles: and they promptly deserted the British alliance. Then came Napoleon's successes: and they threw in their lot with France. At Hyères the forces were nicely balanced. But the union of the French and Spanish fleets put the English in an inferiority of two to one.

In this way the Mediterranean was lost to them—lost, until Nelson made reoccupation possible by his victory at the Nile.

Hotham abandoned the Mediterranean fleet, just as the Mediterranean fleet abandoned the Mediterranean. In his place came Admiral Sir John Jervis, blue at the main; in all things the antithesis of his predecessor. Where Hotham was diffident, Jervis was confident. Where Hotham was kind, Jervis was cruel. Where Hotham was lenient, Jervis was obdurate. Where Hotham was wavering, Jervis was positive. Where Hotham was lax, Jervis was bracing. Where Hotham would have hoisted the signal of recall, Jervis would have signalled for closer action. Where Hotham was contented with second best, Jervis instantly shifted his flag on board of the *Victory*.

Something of the spirit of the *Victory's* new master may be gauged from the following general order:—

*H.M.S. Victory,*  
22nd July 1796.

The Admiral having observed a flippancy in the behaviour of officers when coming upon the *Victory's* quarter-deck . . . and that they do not pull off their hats, and some not even touch them: it is his positive direction, that any officer who shall in future so far forget this essential duty of respect and subordination be admonished publicly.

J. JERVIS.

Hats off to the *Victory*!

It was Jervis's life-work to upset, break, subdue, and overthrow one of the mightiest combinations of naval power that history records. The new France of 1797, borne along on a tidal wave of republican zeal and military enthusiasm, controlled all the coast of Western Europe from Denmark to Italy.

The armed host confronting England extended from the Channel to the Mediterranean. Its northern limit was the Texel; its southern, Gibraltar. France formed the centre of the line, Holland the right wing, and Spain the left. Yet if Jervis with the Mediterranean fleet could crush the left wing, his country might still be saved. For before the new Armada could sweep the British seas, the several units that composed it had first to coalesce. The ships of France had to unite with the Dutch ships; and before that was done the Spanish ships had to join their friends at Brest. Perfidious Albion, the allies assured themselves, might separately resist the Spaniards, Dutch, and French. She could hardly hope to grapple with all three nations together. But first to join forces!

A plan something similar to this had been formed in the very year in which the *Victory* had been laid down. The Toulon fleet was to join the Brest fleet and compass the invasion of England. But the scheme miscarried. Boscawen dismembered the Toulon fleet off the coast of Portugal, and Hawke pinioned the Brest fleet among the rocks of Quiberon. Those were great days. And happily for England their glory was not departed. Jervis was to pinion his prey like Hawke, and tear it limb from limb like Boscawen.

Knowing of the scheme for the discomfiture of his country, Jervis would have preferred to thwart it by strategy. Strategy has been defined as the art of conducting war when not in the presence of the enemy. It comprises all combinations made out of the enemy's sight. Its province is not a single battlefield, but the entire theatre of war. Now, the Spaniards were still in the Mediterranean; and Jervis, if he could have had his own way, would have posted a strong fleet in the sea-pass of Gib-

raltar, so that the combination which his opponents aimed at should never be realized. But Jervis was not allowed to have his own way. His fleet, at its best, was wretchedly small: and the weather grew suddenly hostile. Boisterous storms drove him out of the Strait, and by wrecks reduced his little force still further.

Thus the Spaniards, emerging into the wide Atlantic *en route* for their rendezvous at Brest, opened the campaign with a strategic coup, though this preliminary advantage was not in any way due to their own skill, but to the inscrutable dictates of fortune. It remained to be seen whether Jervis was an admiral of average abilities or the something more which the occasion demanded—a master of naval tactics.

In tactics—that is, in the manœuvres executed in the enemy's presence—success depends upon two factors: strength and skill. If two opponents of equal skill engage, then the stronger will prevail. This was the case at Beachy Head. Tourville was a great admiral: Torrington was not unworthy of him. But Tourville's ships were more numerous, and therefore Tourville won. On the other hand, if two opponents of equal strength engage, then the more skilful antagonist will win the day. A classical example of this truth is the Battle of the Saints. De Grasse was plucky and skilful and strong; but he was outclassed in intellect by Rodney. Of the two essentials, skill, of course, is more vital than strength. Many a commander has had an all-powerful fleet and made nothing of his possibilities, while a clever commander with a tiny force has humbled a proud opponent. This was the case when France and Spain were befooled by "Fabius" Hardy.

Tactical strength in naval warfare is reckoned by



counting ships. At Hyères both sides had twenty-three. At Ushant both sides had thirty. Thus neither side was superior to the other. And if the Government at home is doing its duty, and the dockyards are working full time, equality of numbers should be a foregone conclusion. Commanders should not base their projects on a belief that they will have a line of battle three times or twice or even half as large again as their antagonist's.

But what the clever admiral accomplishes is to secure for himself a local or temporary advantage over a foe who is nominally his equal. Such a thing has even been done against a foe with superior force. Thus, in 1666, Albemarle with a fleet half the size of the Dutch flung the whole of his strength on one-third of the foe. To achieve a success of this kind it is first necessary to discover the weak point in the enemy's disposition. And the weak point in the enemy's disposition is that point which cannot be reinforced in time to prevent it from being overwhelmed by a stronger force of assailants. To discover the weak point requires the intuition of a genius. At the Nile, Nelson found his foe at anchor inshore, when the wind was blowing from the sea. They were rooted, immovable. His force was no greater than theirs. But he planted half of his ships on one side of their van and half of his ships on the other. With a local or temporary superiority of a hundred per cent. he crumpled up his opponent's array from end to end with a destruction that was as complete as it was appalling.

Nelson at the Nile massed his strength upon the enemy's van. Tourville did the same at Beachy Head in 1690. Togo did the same at Tshushima in 1905. There is even more perhaps to be said for massing strength upon the enemy's rear, because the rear is in a constant state of being left behind,

is in consequence more difficult to reinforce, and therefore inherently weaker.

In any case, an attack upon one of the wings of a fleet is usually preferred, because each wing by the nature of things is farther from the other than either is from the centre. Yet it may be worth while to attack the centre itself if by doing so it is possible to break the line, and while holding one half to overwhelm the other. This was the bold stroke which that master of war-craft, Marlborough, carried out on the battlefield of Blenheim. This was the bold stroke which Napoleon executed amid December snows at Austerlitz. And this was the bold stroke that Jervis dared at the sea-fight off Cape St. Vincent.

At daybreak on the morning of February 14, 1797, the Spanish fleet under the command of Don José de Cordova were sailing leisurely eastwards. They were a goodly company. There were twenty-seven sail of the line, and no less than six of them were larger than the *Victory*. The Spanish commander's flag was borne by the *Santissima Trinidad*, a more magnificent vessel even than the *Commerce de Marseille*. The morning was dull and heavy and grey, and a fog clung thickly to the water. The Spaniards moved along under easy sail. They little dreamed that the English had discovered their whereabouts, and even now approached them. The last thing they expected was battle. They were not in close formation; their line straggled. They were bound, so they thought, on a long journey, and were becoming rather tired of it. The ships were not separated by regular intervals, as the allied fleet had been at Cape Spartel. Some of them were sailing side by side in pairs. Some were grouped in little knots of three or four. In places there were gaping intervals that called loudly for redress.

Jervis's fleet presented a lively contrast. Under the magnificent handling of their chief the ships were like the several links of a chain, each strong as each, and each contributing to the perfect strength of an individual whole. Troubridge led the van in the *Culloden*. Collingwood brought up the rear in the *Excellent*. And Jervis's flag in the *Victory* floated proudly in the centre of the line.

The hostile fleets, when the veil of mist lifted, were not, as usual, facing one another. The British were sailing in a southerly direction with the wind at west. The Spaniards, to the south of them, were sailing with the wind abaft, their bowsprits pointing to their own coast. Considerable adjustment was therefore necessary if the opposing sides were to be drawn up parallel to one another, as they had been in every other battle in which the *Victory* had had a share.

But Jervis was determined at all hazards to deny the Spaniards any chance of amending their array. Retaining his own formation, he dashed upon them, not in line abreast but in line ahead. This method of attack might have been highly dangerous if the defending force had been ready and armed point-device. But by their total lack of organization a well-timed temerity was justified. The British fleet, wielded like a rapier in Jervis's hand, did not blunt itself against a bar of steel, but deftly sliced through the Spanish line as if it had been a cucumber.

The battle, needless to say, was half won when this point had been reached. For the Spaniards were demoralized by their mishap. The disaster robbed them at once of all cohesion and all initiative. Their backbone was broken: they were cut in half. And the English line was drawn through their own, like a sword through a man's vitals. How was their mangled body to be healed? How were the halves to unite? These were the questions that the Spaniards

asked themselves, leaving Jervis at liberty to take whatever steps he chose to complete their disintegration.

The Spaniards originally had twenty-seven ships. By Jervis's pitiless gash they were reduced to two fragments, the one consisting of nine ships, the other of eighteen. Jervis had lunged through their line not at its exact centre but at the point where he judged it to be weakest. The disruption of their force was more important to him than delicate dissection. Indeed, if his fleet had been equal to theirs—as it should have been—the relative strength of their dismembered portions would have mattered nothing at all. But Jervis's fleet was not equal to theirs. In fact, it was very far from equal. It numbered in all only fifteen ships.

Jervis had struck one of the grandest strokes ever delivered at sea with a fleet only very little more than half the size of his opponent's!

For this reason, when once the rent was made, he would have preferred, if possible, to fling himself on the smaller Spanish squadron, over which he would have enjoyed a local superiority. But the smaller squadron lay nearer to the coast and farthest from the breeze. If Jervis attacked it he would lay himself open to a counter-attack from the larger squadron, which was nearer the wind than himself. To do this would have been to neutralize a hardly-won advantage. Necessity therefore obliged him to engage the larger detachment of the two.

Here the problem that faced the British admiral was not only one of preferring skill to skill and overcoming valour by greater valour—there was the additional difficulty of coping with unwieldiness, of keeping back the ugly rush of a crowd. For the greater Spanish squadron, though only a detachment, was larger than the whole of Jervis's fleet. The

eighteen ships that were brought up on one side of the British fence were determined, as soon as possible, to join their friends on the other side. The fence was too impenetrable for them to force a way through. They had no resort left but to go round. If the English fleet had been sailing to the north, they would for that reason have turned to the south. And as the English were already committed to a southerly advance, they naturally turned to the north. The engaged fleets in consequence began to sidle past each other much as Keppel and his foes had done at the Battle of Ushant. But when the leading Spanish vessels, now well to the northward, began to draw clear of their opponents, instead of attempting to amend their line—instead of attempting any military manœuvre for the bettering of their own position or the worsting of their foe's—they put before the wind again to double round the end of their adversary's line and fly from the stricken field.

Jervis, perched upon the *Victory's* poop, saw the movement. He himself was carefully shepherding his flock, so as to continue the fight without either losing touch with the Spaniards or allowing their two detachments any chance to reform. His fleet at the moment was curved into the shape of the capital letter J, with himself at the bend, with Collingwood at the tip of the long right arm and Troubridge at the tip of the shorter left. Troubridge was lustily barking at the heels of the Spanish rear, and Collingwood was still nicely placed for hounding the Spanish van. But though Troubridge's ship, the *Culloden*, was now on the port tack as the Spaniards were, Collingwood's ship, the *Excellent*, was still on the starboard tack, and his gradual withdrawal in a southerly direction gave the panic-stricken Spaniards their loophole of escape.

What was to be done? If the fugitive Spaniards had their own way, they might still reach home with numbers undiminished. They had been buffeted. They had been humiliated. They had been held up to ignominy. Stalwart and strong, they had been made to look ridiculous. The giant had been thrown by the dwarf, and his prestige had vanished. But that was not enough for Jervis. He desired his conquest to be absolute. In a battle ashore, if his had been infantry engaged, now was the moment when he would have rallied all the horsemen he could muster and hurled them on the instant like a thunderbolt, to drive in his adversary's right. But this was not a battle ashore, and he had nothing to correspond with cavalry. What he wanted was an independent squadron, up there to the north of the field. That was what he wanted; that was what he deserved. And that was what Providence sent him.

Nelson's ship was just ahead of Collingwood's. Only a single vessel separated them: the *Captain* was third from the end of the line. Nelson had watched the development of the fight with the same discernment as Jervis. All that Jervis saw, he saw. All that Jervis felt, he felt. All that Jervis knew, he knew. With instant decision he resolved himself into the squadron that was needed. It is true that he had but a single ship, and there were at least seven Spanish ships to stop. But the need was great, if the means were small. It is true that the most stringent rules of the service forbade a single ship to leave her place. But his death would atone for broken by-laws. So, like Samson, blind to all but the great purpose in his brain, he put forth his strength and prayed that he might die—if, dying, he might overthrow once and for all the nation that conspired against his king.

And so the greatest of British sailors deliberately moved from the line to make his great sacrifice. He

stood alone against seven ships, and held them back and stopped them, six others and the mighty *Trinidad* herself. But Troubridge came up to his help; and Jervis, in anguish for the man he loved, signalled the *Excellent* also to leave her place and hasten to the rescue. And the rest came up in time; the *Victory* too. The fight was renewed, and the Spaniards thrashed. And Nelson was not killed; but lived to take two prizes himself, as all the world knows. And Collingwood emulated him in friendly rivalry, and brought two other Spanish flags down. And the whole British fleet smote and harried and harassed and oppressed the Spaniards till the day declined. And the *Victory* took a prize with her own hands—the *Salvador del Mundo*. And when a man was killed at Jervis's side and he was drenched with blood from his hat to his shoes, he took no more notice than you would take of a drop or two of rain. And the Spanish flight became a rout, and the rout an avalanche of terror. The little squadron of nine had long since fled, counting honour less than their lives. They had fled, and none taken note of them. They were powerless to help or hurt. But the greater squadron was pursued relentlessly, and bitten and stricken and mauled. And the *Trinidad's* flag came down at last, though it was dark by now, and when no one was looking she hauled it up again. Time was too short and the British ships too few to capture all of the Spaniards. But a great fight and a memorable had been fought: and Spain was vanquished and her ships shattered in a manner that would have made Sir Francis Drake chuckle had he been alive to see. And the coalition against England was overthrown: and Jervis was made an earl, and the King said that he must be called Lord St. Vincent: and Nelson wore the star of the Bath upon his breast and hoisted his flag as an admiral.

## CHAPTER X

### BATTLE

*"Captain," they cry, "the fight is done,  
They bid you send your sword!"  
And he answered, "Grapple her stern and bow,  
They have asked for steel. They shall have it now.  
Out cutlasses and board!"*                      KIPLING.

WHETHER at Ushant or Cape Spartel, Hyères or Cape St. Vincent, whenever the *Victory* broke the red flag for battle at the fore a breathless tumult of activity swept the decks. The drummer of marines with his drum slung over his shoulders beat a continuous tattoo that rolled from one end of the vessel to the other. And every man in hot haste hurried to execute the work assigned to him.

The first thing to do was to clear the decks. All the wooden bulkheads were removed, all the canvas screens taken down. All the partitions that in peace made for comfort and privacy were swept away like the scenery in stage-land. Tables, chairs, lockers, and chests were buried in the hold. The captain was treated in as summary a fashion as the ordinary seaman. His furniture was carried away in bulk. He was not allowed so much as a chair. Apart from the danger of splinters which inflicted uglier wounds than lead and steel, the first need was to have a clear space, unhampered, unencumbered, absolutely free. In fact, when time was short and proper stowage in the hold would have taken too long, the furniture was in the most ruthless way cast overboard.



The hammocks, of course, were piped from below at the earliest possible moment. Neatly rolled and tightly corded, in parcels of exactly similar pattern, they were packed by pairs in the hammock-nettings that ran along the tops of the bulwarks. Here they formed a breastwork and very real protection from musketry. And it was musketry to which the workers on the upper deck were particularly exposed.

Thus much being done, the galley fire was hastily extinguished, and the fighting decks were watered and dressed with a sprinkling of sand. The seamen fought with bare feet: and when the blood began to flow they would have been unable to stand but for the foothold which this preparation afforded them.

If weather had been bad and the guns were secured with their muzzles triced up and lashed to housing-bolts above the port, the port-lids were raised and the guns cast loose. The tompions, or tallowed plugs in the mouths of the guns to keep the barrels dry, were withdrawn. Adjuncts and accessories were set ready. Cheeses or bundles of wads were placed by each gun, and a reserve store garnered by the main mast. Spare breechings were brought, and tackles and handspikes. The shot-racks by the guns and round the coamings of the hatchways were filled with round-shot scraped free from rust. Rope rings or grommets called garlands were also used to keep the shot from rolling with the motion of the ship. Along the deck behind the guns were placed casks about eighteen inches high with sunken heads perforated with holes. These were match-tubs. The match was made of a very loose rope steeped in a solution of nitre, and burned at the rate of about one inch an hour. The lighted end of the match, when not in use, was suspended through a hole in

the match-tub, which was partially filled with moistened sand. Other tubs or buckets of water were freely disposed along the decks, with a hand-swab beside or within them. These served a double purpose. They were useful in extinguishing sparks; and when the loathsome pungent smoke of burning gunpowder made the atmosphere of the gun decks unendurable, the seamen dipped their faces in the water and washed their mouths and sponged their chests.

While the guns' crews were busy above, the gunner and his mates were busy below. The lights were set burning in the light-rooms, and under this scant illumination the work of making fresh cartridges went forward as quickly as possible. No one could tell in how short a time the existing stock would be exhausted.

The carpenter with his gang, after seeing that a fresh tiller was handy to come by in the event of a shot penetrating the walls of the gun-room, repaired to the orlop. His first business was to see that the wings were clear—that is, that there was an unobstructed passage along the sides of the ship where the walls were submerged and yet near the surface. For the vessel as she rolled exposed her vitals, and shot-holes in the underwater parts were only too likely to prove mortal. It was the work of the carpenter in the hour of battle to see that they did not prove mortal. With this end in view he had ready for use a number of shot-plugs. These were made of wood. They were conical in shape to fit all sizes of hole, and the better to fulfil their purpose were covered with oakum and tallow. For gaping wounds, resort was had to sheet lead and salted hides, which were hammered over the breach by means of nails. The carpenter prepared also a number of slings for hoisting and lowering his crew over the sides when

they were obliged to undertake the unpleasant task of repairs outboard the ship.

As soon as the roll of the drum was heard the ship was put under battle-canvas. This meant that sail was shortened. It was necessary while fighting that the ship should move, but not necessary that the ship should move quickly; and every hand that could be spared was needed at the guns. For these reasons the vessel was put under something like storm-canvas. Not only were the courses clewed up, but every sail was taken in except the fore and main topsails and the fore-and-aft sail on the mizzen. If the weather was dry, water was made to play upon the sails in order to diminish the risk of fire. At the same time many ingenious twists and turns were given to the standing rigging, so that if one part were injured or shot away another might do its work. The yards were a terrible menace during battle; the lower yards in particular. The main yard was seven-eighths the length of the main mast. Its fall was a catastrophe too appalling to contemplate. The hempen slings that held it and other yards in position were replaced ere the cannonade began by strong top-chains. And to catch the splinters a stout netting was spread in a horizontal position from the main mast aft to the mizzen. This not only safeguarded the lives of the officers on the quarter-deck, but more than once proved the salvation of wounded men falling from aloft.

The hatchways were a fruitful source of danger. Through their gaping mouths a fireball or burning ember might fall and explode the cartridges below, and even put an entire deck out of action. To prevent this, fire-screens were used. These were made of a thick felt called "fearnought." Special pains were taken with the passages leading to the magazines. These were covered with a blanket of sodden flannel,

through a rent in which the gunner handed his supplies to the powder-monkeys.<sup>1</sup> The powder-monkeys carried the cartridges in cartridge-boxes, which were cylindrical in shape with a lid sliding upon a handle of small rope. These served a double purpose. They shielded the cartridges from premature explosion and they acted as passports to the hatchways. As they were issued only to powder-monkeys, there was no opportunity for the craven-hearted to slip below on pretence of visiting the magazines. All the hatchways were guarded. At the main hatch a sergeant of marines was stationed to prevent the slightly wounded from deserting their posts, and his efforts were seconded with laudable enthusiasm by midshipmen carrying pistols.

The surgeon and his assistants were as busy as everyone else. The sick-bay, the scene of their labours during peace, was deserted. Their activities were transferred to the orlop, which, being below the water-line, was the safest place for the wounded. The after part, or cockpit, normally the sanctum of the midshipmen, was cleared of all save the amputation table. Spare sails were disposed for the accommodation of those requiring surgical aid, and an extra supply of lanterns converted the murkiest abyss of the ship for once into a hall of light. The loblolly-boys or dressers carried tourniquets or screw-bandages to the fighting decks, so that the severely wounded might not die from loss of blood before they could be brought below. This done, they set out a table with a horrifying assortment of instruments, prepared long strips of lint six inches wide, procured hot water, and set ready a large tub or two for the disposal of what the tars with plucky waggish-

<sup>1</sup> There were thirty-one boys serving on board the *Victory* at the Battle of Trafalgar. Eleven of them were under fourteen, and there was one little mite of ten.

ness described as "legs and wings." The surgeon and his companions stripped off their coats and rolled up their shirt-sleeves to the shoulders. Presently they were joined by the chaplain and purser. The one offered drink to dry lips and parched tongues; the other ministered consolation to the dying. In case the action should prove gory and the midshipmen's berths inadequate, additional provision was made for the wounded by the preparation of platforms in the cable tier.

Innumerable as were the preparations for battle, the speed with which they were made was truly remarkable. Within six minutes of the time that the drummer lifted his sticks to sound the tattoo, the first lieutenant started on his rounds, and by that time all was done. Everything was in readiness. Such, at least, was always the case on board the *Victory*.

The men stood at quarters, the crows and handspikes in their hands. They were, as a rule, clad in their trousers and nothing more. The work before them was hot work, and in the event of accidents a scanty attire made the surgeon's work easier. The silk handkerchiefs which smartened their appearance in full rig were now bound closely over the ears to save them from deafness. They spoke cheerfully to one another, as if battle and sudden death were matters for amusement. This gaiety, however, was a cloak to their real feelings, and did not prevent them from confiding to one another a tender message to be carried home or a last will and testament in regard to personal possessions. Those who were to fight from the tops manned the shrouds and hurried up aloft.

In all there were over eight hundred officers and men on board the *Victory* in time of battle. The officers numbered about fifty-five, and more than

half of these were master's-mates and midshipmen. Of the men, the majority were at the guns. At the quarter-deck guns there were fifty men, and twenty on the forecastle. On the main deck there were one hundred and fifty men; on the middle deck, one hundred and eighty; and on the lower or gun deck, two hundred and twenty-five. Nearly fifty men and boys were engaged in or about the magazines, helping the gunner to fill new cartridges and passing them along as required. Some twenty or so were needed at the hatchways, and half as many again helped the surgeon in the cockpit. The marines fell in with their muskets on the poop, and here also were stationed the signal staff—a lieutenant, three midshipmen, and nine or ten men. The remainder of the ship's company were employed in smaller batches. Some made up small-arm parties for service in the tops. Some, as we have seen, were employed by the carpenter. Some patched up the rigging. Some dived into the hold or into the store-rooms for arms, provisions, ropes, and other necessities.

"In a sea-fight," writes Admiral Sir Reginald Custance, "the object is at all ranges, and in a given time, to strike blows greater in number than those received." This is as true of the past and of the future as of the present. Command of the sea has belonged and will belong to the nation that makes the finest weapons and handles them best when made. Guns were first carried by a British battleship at the beginning of the fifteenth century. The *Christopher of the Tower* of 1410 had three of them. They were made of iron bars, welded together into the shape of a tube, and coated with a covering of oak, which was kept in its place by hempen girdles. Very fearsome weapons they were, especially to those who fired them. But from the time of their

introduction great guns or cannon have remained the chief engine of naval warfare.

The *Victory's* big guns were all of the same pattern. They differed only in size. The barrel of the weapon was usually made of iron, but if expense was no object, of brass. In shape it tapered from the breech to the muzzle; the circumference at the muzzle being seven times, and the circumference at the breech eleven times, the circumference of the bore. In this way the weapon was stoutest where the risk of damage by explosion was greatest. Two supporting arms or trunnions projected from opposite sides. Balanced on these, the breech of the gun sank by its own weight, and so automatically aided the gunners when they desired to change their elevation. The hindmost part of the breech terminated in a large ball or knob, which the sailors called a pommelion. This feature, familiar enough to us from old pictures and prints, was intended not for ornament but use.

For the guns, it must be understood, were not fixed on a stable mounting like the guns of our fleet to-day. And this for two reasons. The biggest weapons were close to the water-line. The embrasures or gun-ports through which they were pointed measured something like three feet square, and a roll of twelve degrees brought their sills upon a level with the waves. Imagine the water that could be shipped through fourteen holes, each of them three feet square! Lord Howe once insisted on working his lower-deck guns in a gale; and a gunnery lieutenant of his has left it on record that, falling to the deck, he was drenched to the skin. But Lord Howe accepted unusual risks. Often enough a ship had to batten down her gun-ports and caulk the interstices. And when this happened the guns themselves had to be safely housed inboard. Yet they

could not, of course, be fired with safety until their muzzles protruded through the ports.

Then, again, the old guns were muzzle-loaders. Before a round could be fired, the barrel had to be cleaned and the cannon loaded. To withdraw any chance remnants of the previous charge a great instrument like a giant's corkscrew was plunged down the mouth of the gun. Then a great mop, called a sponge, was forced down the bore. The barrel being clear and cool, received a cartridge, which was rammed home with a rammer. A wad or plug of coiled junk was then lodged in its throat. A round-shot followed, and another wad. The mouth of the gun, of course, could not be reached while the muzzle was pointed through the gun-port; and thus the entire weapon had to be within the vessel's precincts—except when it was being fired.

In movement, then, lay much of the art and all the craft of old-time gunnery. The ordnance, whatever its weight, had to be handled, had to be shifted by human hands into a position ready for firing. There were no mechanical devices employed beyond ropes and blocks. It was "Haul away!" and "Haul again!" The work was onerous to the last degree. It was exhausting. The men stripped; yet the sweat poured off them, and the tense muscles stood out swollen and stiff on their arms and breasts and shoulders. It was not uncommon at the conclusion of a fight for the men to fall like logs beside the guns, dead-tired, if there were ever meaning in the word. The officer going his rounds would find it impossible to rouse them. Their ears were insensible to sound, their limbs to feeling. Only the regular heaving of their chests told that they were still alive.

The heavy labour of moving the carriages accounts for the unequal distribution of the *Victory's* complement among the various gun decks. The heavier



the gun, the greater the number of men required to move it. The light guns upon the main deck required ten men apiece. The heaviest guns on the gun deck could not be hauled with their muzzles through the port by a crew numbering less than fifteen.

The frame upon which a gun was mounted was appropriately called the carriage. It consisted of two thick planks laid on edge and held apart by a floor. These brackets, or cheeks, supported the trunnions of the gun, and were sufficiently far apart to allow the breech to sink between them. Their hinder sides were cut away in steps, which the seamen used as props when they levered up the gun with their handspikes. A stout wedge upon the floor of the carriage was pulled outwards or pushed inwards to keep the breech at the desired elevation when once it had been raised or lowered. The carriage itself rested on two axle-trees, which were borne on broad low, solid wooden wheels, called trucks. All parts of the mounting—brackets, floor, and wheels—were made of elm, as less liable than other woods to splinter.

Much labour may have been needed to run out a gun, but none was needed to run it in. The force of the fire hurled it back. The recoil, in fact, was so formidable that the very lives of the gunners were in jeopardy. To stop the gun on the recoil, a rope of special strength was used, called a breeching. This was secured to ring-bolts at either side of the port, and rove through or fastened to the knob or pommelion at the breech of the gun. And in this way the cannon was shackled.

Though the *Victory* called herself a 100-gun ship, at the time of her most famous battle she mounted 104 pieces of ordnance. She mounted thirty guns on the gun deck and main deck, fifteen on either broad-side, and twenty-eight guns on the middle deck.

In addition to these, she found room for sixteen on her quarter-deck and fore-castle. The most important projectiles thrown by these guns were round-shot made of solid iron. These differed in size according to the size of the cannon. The main-deck guns of the *Victory*, together with the guns on the quarter-deck and fore-castle, fired a shot weighing twelve pounds. The middle-deck guns fired a shot of twenty-four pounds, and the lower-deck guns a shot of thirty-two pounds. The upper and main-deck guns were often referred to as "bull-dogs," and the lower-deck guns as "barkers." The main deck showed its teeth and snarled; but the gun deck spoke like a pack of stag-hounds, uttering rumbling thunder or howling through iron mouths.

The *Victory's* biggest guns had an extreme range of between a mile and a mile and a half. But this was reached only when they were considerably elevated. With a slight elevation they would carry 1,500 yards, and at point-blank range 500 yards. In short, it may be said that to be really effective they needed to be within half a mile of their target, though they were capable of working enormous havoc at any range up to three-quarters of a mile. At close quarters the *Victory's* larger guns could pierce five feet of solid oak, and the smaller guns two and a half feet. The charge of gunpowder required was one-third the weight of the shot. At close quarters it was customary to double-shot the guns. This method of loading reduced the velocity and rendered the aim erratic; but there was this compensation: the two shots separated the moment they left the barrel, and the gun that fired them did the work of two. The practice, however, was dangerous, and not unattended by accidents. The value of round-shot is attested by the opinion of all practical gunners of those days. "Use nothing else while a single round-

shot remains," was an oft-repeated maxim of the expert. Cases could be cited where a naval commander, after a successful bombardment of a fort, sent parties ashore to collect the shot and bring them back in boats. Such men found it matter for recurring regret that the same economy could not be practised at sea.

If it was desired to set an enemy's ship on fire, the round-shots were heated to a white heat. The glowing balls were brought to the mouth of the gun in shot-carriers, utensils something like coal-scuttles with two long-jointed wooden handles at the sides, and a third at the base of the scuttle to tip the shot into the bore. Special measures of precaution were needed to prevent the gunpowder from exploding prematurely. Some gunners used wet wads; others put a cold shot next to the cartridge; but the best safeguard was a trencher or disc of green wood.

There were many other missiles in addition to round-shot. Case-shot or canister was peculiarly adapted for close quarters. It consisted of a number of musket bullets packed in a cylindrical tin case exactly fitting the bore of the gun. When discharged, the bullets were sprinkled in every direction, like water from the rose of a watering-can. Grape-shot was intermediate between canister and round, with much of the destructive spread of the first and some of the range and penetration of the second. It consisted of three tiers of cast-iron balls weighing about two pounds apiece. There were generally three balls in each tier, and the tiers were kept apart by parallel discs of iron, connected by a central pin. The whole was enclosed in a canvas bag, bound tightly round with rope.

Grape-shot, with its variants burrel and langridge, was formidable also in use against sails. Then there was an extraordinary diversity of missiles, beloved

by the French, and designed solely for the destruction of rigging. Chain-shot was the commonest. The chain, which was usually a foot in length, sometimes linked together two solid iron balls; sometimes irregular objects, in shape like ninepins or soup-ladles or bowler-hats or castanets. An extremely neat and compact type in appearance resembled a round-shot. But the round-shot was hollow and divided in two, and the chain was packed away in the cavities. Faggot-shot was a solid iron cylinder, sliced into pieces like a cake. The fragments were confined until the moment of discharge by belts of ordinary string in shallow grooves. Star-shot was not like a star, but more like a crown or a lantern or a bird-cage. Bar-shot affected various patterns. Sometimes it resembled a dumb-bell; sometimes a couple of iron saucers with a poker in between; sometimes three small iron spades slung together on a ring. Then there were numerous kinds of elongating shot. Imagine a pair of iron pestles, each with a ring at the end of its shaft. Intertwine the shafts by means of the rings, and you have a missile which, as it emerged from the bore, just doubled itself in length.

Length was in a manner of speaking the quality most welcome in these rigging destroyers. Round after round of grape or solid shot might pass between ropes without hurting them, but there was no escaping these flying dumb-bells and ploughshares and elongating reaping-hooks. The stoutest stay was hacked in two and the shrouds were torn to ribbons. And when once the standing rigging was gone, little hope remained for the masts.

All the hideous missiles that have been named could be fired from the ordinary guns. They could also be fired from four extraordinary guns which, when the *Victory* carried the flag of Lord Hood in

1793, were substituted for an equal number of 12-pounders on the upper deck. Two of these weapons were mounted on the poop and two on the fore-castle.<sup>1</sup> They were short little pieces, not unrelated to the mortar or bomb-thrower. Their recoil was slight. They had next to no range. But at close quarters they were terrible in their destructiveness. Some called them "smashers." Some, because they were made at Carron, near Falkirk, christened them carronades. The word "smasher" is certainly descriptive. The long gun fought like a gentleman, but the carronade like a stage assassin. It had no skill. It could not aim straight. But it struck suddenly and unexpectedly, with a horrible upward jerk and thrust that spread consternation along the decks. For a while the 32-pound shot was the deadliest projectile that the carronade delivered. But just before the Battle of Trafalgar the *Victory* rejected two of the heavy guns on her fore-castle in favour of two fearsome instruments, each capable of swallowing and vomiting forth a charge more than twice the weight of anything fired before. And, as will be seen, at Trafalgar the 68-pounder carronade wrought a havoc that was truly appalling.<sup>2</sup>

As soon as the roll of the drum sent everyone to his station, a number of seamen manned the shrouds and ran up the ratlines to the fighting tops.<sup>3</sup> From here a clear view was obtainable of the enemy's upper deck. And from here much damage could be done by clever and cool marksmen; but only, of course, at close quarters. The fighting-tops, like

<sup>1</sup> This arrangement was not retained very long.

<sup>2</sup> In 1781 the *Victory* accepted six 18-pounder carronades for the poop, so that for a time she was in effect a 110-gun ship. But the poop carronades were removed before Trafalgar.

<sup>3</sup> The *Victory's* main top was railed in, and could accommodate forty or fifty men. |

the carronades, were useless at a distance. The principal weapons used by the topmen were muskets, musketoons, and hand grenades. The muskets had a range of about a hundred yards. They were smooth of bore. They were muzzle-loaders, and they had no sights. They gave no hint of the development of which they would one day be capable when rifling should be introduced. The musketoons were overgrown muskets, mounted on swivel crutches. Their barrels were stoutly made, and were double or treble shot with musket bullets. The hand grenades required in their management a double portion of coolness and promptitude. Weighing about two pounds, they contained a bursting charge which was exploded by means of a time fuse. The grenadier had to ignite his fusee and throw it with judgment, strength, and precision. These grenades were never made, like modern bombs, to explode on concussion. Sometimes even they were picked up by daring spirits and hurled overboard into the sea. Marryat, in *The King's Own*, gives an example of this. A small boy on board one of His Majesty's ships saw a grenade strike the main bitts and roll slowly aft. When it exploded, one of the fragments knocked his hat off and mortally wounded a friend of his, the quartermaster at the conn. Presently a second grenade struck the deck by his side. He tried to lift it, and finding it too heavy, adroitly rolled it through the larboard entering port. Before it reached the water it exploded.

But however effective may have been the work of topmen, it was incapable by itself of determining the issue, except in the case of single-ship actions.

In a pitched battle, success was almost invariably achieved by the main batteries of heavy guns. And in gunnery there was one factor that counted more than all the diabolical devices which the wit and

ingenuity of man could evolve; more than the heaviest weight of metal, more than the most infernal carronade. If success in battle turned upon tactics, if tactics were based upon gunnery, then just as truly gunnery itself depended upon the men behind the guns. A certain French captain, after defending his ship with heroic fortitude, was obliged at last to submit. The English captain who received his surrender returned to him his sword. He had fought a gallant fight, and deserved nothing less. The Frenchman gazed at the weapon, and the tears filled his eyes. "I was thinking," he said, "of my own fellows. I am sorry to have stained it with their blood. How do you, sir, keep your seamen at the guns?" "Keep them at the guns!" exclaimed the Englishman. "Why, the devil himself could not drive them away."

Often enough in a pitched battle the two long parallel lines that made up the opposing fleets fell unconsciously but naturally into a series of single-ship duels. Under such conditions, a pair of tough and dogged fighters might hammer one another with relentless fury. If neither would submit, and the ships, becoming more and more injured in their rigging, drifted down and collided with one another, the matter was decided by boarding. The captain at the outset of the battle picked out those who were destined for this desperate affray, and armed them with tomahawks, pistols, and cutlasses. The tomahawks were light, handy hatchets, a sharp blade on one side and a sharp pick on the other. The blade was valued for the clean effectiveness with which it cut through hindering ropes and hostile shrouds; the pick for the purchase it gave to a boarder as he struggled over the bulwarks. The pistol was an exceedingly useful weapon; and as there was no time for reloading, the boarder usually carried a

brace. The cutlass was regarded by every jack-tar as the trustiest of friends. It had a broad, curving blade, about three feet long.

When boarders were called away, assaults were generally made upon the enemy's ship at more points of attack than one. The numbers of a boarding party were never large. The resistance to be overcome was not the resistance of an entire ship, but the resistance of her upper deck. The boarders based their hopes of success on the probability that the mass of their opponents would stick to their guns below and know nothing of their danger until it had overwhelmed them. If the upper deck were captured, and its defenders all killed or cowed into submission, the rest of the vessel was certainly paralysed. The big guns were impotent. The hatchways would not allow the ship's company to ascend in numbers sufficient for rescue work; and the few that did succeed in coming up were easily knocked on the head. The hatches, too, could be battened down and the lower decks isolated.

The best weapons for defence against boarding were muskets, blunderbusses, and pikes. The objection to the musket was the time consumed in loading. Yet many seamen did wonders with it, holding it in reverse by the barrel and swinging it round their heads like a felling axe. The blunderbuss was a short fire-arm with a large bore and wide mouth. It scattered broadcast a handful of pistol bullets or slugs. The pike, which on shore had been rendered obsolete by the coming of the bayonet, was still esteemed at sea. The defenders had only to grasp the staff in their hands and wait for their enemies to jump and impale themselves. Picture to yourself a party of boarders. Before them rises the wooden wall of their own bulwarks. They spring upon the hammock-nettings and are confronted by a gaping



ravine. Can they spring across? If they do, there is the descent to be made from the enemy's bulwarks. And a glinting row of boarding pikes rises like an impassable zareba. All the time the vessels plunge distractingly with the rolling motion of the sea.

When a pair of hard fighters were separated by a wide interval, boarding, of course, was impossible. But there were other ways in which a vessel could be reduced to an utter state of panic and demoralization. It has been said that when the roll of the drum was heard, the vessel was put under battle-canvas. This consisted, as a rule, of the fore topsail, the main topsail, and the mizzen course. The fore topsail was spread by the fore topsail yard, and the fore topsail yard was supported by the fore topmast. Now, suppose the fore topmast or the fore topsail yard to be smashed by a cannon-shot; then the vessel lost in a second one-third of her motive-power. Three or four lucky shots were sufficient to reduce a magnificent fighting machine into an unmanageable wreck. Helpless upon the water, a thing inert, a tangled skein of useless ropes, the wretched ship was as much at the mercy of her foes as an unhorsed knight in the days of body-armour. It remained for an adversary to inflict the *coup de grâce*. This was done by drawing a broadside athwart her bows or, for preference, her stern. The glass windows of the officers' cabins offered no resistance whatsoever, and the pitiless round-shot swept the decks from the stern galleries to the figurehead. The effect of a raking broadside was staggering. It paralysed the courage of the most intrepid. Men fell in scores, and sometimes in hundreds; and the bravest flag came down.

The destruction of the rudder was almost as disastrous as the wreckage of the fighting sails. And hardly less fatal was the powerlessness to which a

vessel was reduced when a battery was put out of action. Sometimes the carriages were knocked to pieces. Sometimes from overloading, from overheating, or from carelessness, the guns themselves burst. And often enough the breechings were broken by the force and violence of the recoil. The fracture of a breeching was the most unaccountable of accidents. No one could explain it. The rope used was the stoutest procurable, and yet it snapped like a silken filament. The more the gun was used and the hotter it grew, the more violent was the recoil. This was the only explanation. And the only remedy was to reeve a new breeching-rope. The gun crews were practised at this, but the process was a lengthy one, and consumed about forty minutes. In forty minutes, and sometimes less, a battle has been lost and won.

The admiral and the captain usually stood upon the quarter-deck throughout the battle. The position was a dangerous one, and a safer place might easily have been found. But there was no part of the vessel from which a better view of the battle could be gained, with the exception of the poop; and the poop was more exposed than the quarter-deck. Both admiral and captain had to watch the battle with untiring eyes. The admiral observed the contest as a whole from one end of the line to the other; the captain directed the progress of the fray as it concerned his ship alone. He carried a sword, but found his trumpet more useful. This was a kind of megaphone, through which he called words of direction and encouragement. As the zone of fire was reached, "Stand by, my hearts of oak! Stand by!" When courage was needed, "Stand fast! Stand fast!" When the firing grew wild, "Steady! Steady!" And when the shot went home, "Well done, my lads, well done!" A number of midshipmen stood beside him,

ready to dart away with messages to the petty officers in that place or this, and to the lieutenants in charge of the guns.

If the captain fell at his post, his place was taken by the first lieutenant. If the first lieutenant fell, his place was taken by the second lieutenant. And so the command devolved from one to another so long as there was an officer alive to fight the ship. If all the executive officers were slain, the master took charge, and after him the gunner.

Some officers dressed for battle as they would have dressed for their wedding-day, with full uniform: cocked hat, stiffly starched shirt-frill, and tightly tied black cravat. Others were not so particular. A brimless old beaver, the nap bleached by the sun and splashed and matted by the rain; an old-fashioned uniform coat with a long waist and short skirts; a dingy white waistcoat, and ancient duck trousers, were thought good enough apparel for the grimy work of a gun deck. All, however, agreed that an orange or a lemon was the only possible form of refreshment. Rodney sent for lemons in the thick of the fighting at the Saints. Jervis cried eagerly for an orange as he stood upon the poop at St. Vincent. And there is a story of the Battle of Hyères, that went the circuit of the ward-rooms, and may very well be true. A certain officer celebrated in the fleet for his cavernous mouth felt himself choking in the sulphur-laden atmosphere. He procured an orange, tore a piece of the skin off, and put it to his lips. As he did so a bullet smote him in the cheek, passed through his mouth, and out again without breaking a single tooth. The gentleman was of a somewhat sour disposition, and his unfeeling companions assured him that his dimples were not unbecoming.

A ship of the line proceeding into battle main-

tained a strict silence. This was unbroken except by the quartermaster at the conn and the leadsman in the chains. And their remarks, chanted like cathedral responses, did but add to the solemnity of the scene. But when the fighting line was reached, every occasion was seized for a burst of British cheers. These were uttered not merely as tokens of defiance, not merely as plaudits of success. They served as something more. They served as a medium of communication between the bows of the ship and the stern, between one deck and another. The gangs of fighters were so separated that they knew how none were faring save themselves. They were so cooped up that they could see nothing but their own gun and the faces of their comrades through the smoke. The cheer was the audible voice of man. It rolled along the deck and out of the ports. It was answered by cheery thunder in return. It went from heart to heart, and stirred up all that was noblest in the seaman's breast. It elevated his spirit and his courage. It invigorated and strengthened him. It told his fellow-fighters that all was well with him. Its answer assured him that above him and below Britons were standing to their guns. The shout of courage made it easier to triumph. The shout of triumph made it easier to die.

We are told that when Joan of Arc entered Orleans, she made it her first duty to teach her soldiers that there was in God's truth no magic or witchcraft in the roar of the English hurrahs. Had a second Joan taken a fleet into action, the wooden walls of France might not have fallen so fast at the sound of our seamen cheering.

The casualties on board the *Victory* and other ships took the form of shattered arms and broken legs. Behind the bulwarks men were safe enough. The damage was done when they hauled on the gun-

tackle or cleaned the barrel and rammed home the shot. In these several operations they exposed their limbs through the aperture of the gun-port. Death, of course, might be instantaneous; but more frequently one arm or both called for instant amputation. If there was any chance for a wounded man, his comrades applied a tourniquet and bore him below to the cockpit. Here he took his place upon the sail and patiently waited his turn for the knife. Surgery was of a cruel, ruthless kind. There were no anæsthetics. The loblolly-boys, as they helped the victim to the amputation table, gave him a liberal dose of rum and a piece of leather to bite in his agony.

That was all the help available, and the seamen knew it. They rose to the occasion with a fortitude that would have graced the annals of Sparta. It was a point of honour in crack ships not to cry out when the knife made its horrible incision; not to shriek when the saw was laid to the bone; not to gasp and groan when the operation was finished and the sickly pain set in, with its continuous throb. A certain Thomas Main, able seaman of the *Leviathan*, having an arm shattered, went below unattended. He sat down without uttering a sound and waited his turn. But when he was laid upon the amputation table he sang "Rule Britannia" all through with a clear, unwavering voice while the surgeons removed his limb. Another seaman was struck while loading his gun. His arms were shattered, and both were removed. This done, he began to sing in a peculiarly hearty and cheerful manner. "I'm trying my hand at a ballad," he said; "for now I've lost both my wings, I guess I'll be turned on the streets."

Captain Ball, one of Nelson's favourite captains, was by no means the typical sailor of the story books. He was gentle and kind. He was modest and motherly and full of good works. When he was Governor

of Malta the people uncovered as he passed and set his portrait beside that of the Virgin. No one who knew him would ever have accused him of uttering empty boasts. Yet it was Captain Ball who said that the courage of Englishmen was superior in quality to that of any other nation. In battle, he said, and in the heat of a crisis, the courage of a nation will surge up like the tide at its flow. Man will infect man, and the craven will look at his comrade and imitate the bravery which he thinks he sees there. And as like a tide it rises, so like a tide does the courage of a multitude ebb. But the courage of Englishmen, said Captain Ball, is not the electric thrill that passes to and fro through a crowd, but the sum of the courage of each individual, of every courageous man.

A battle at sea in the olden days presented to one who took part in it a series of sounds rather than a succession of pictures. The roar of the heavy artillery, the roll and thud of the gun-carriages, the smash of the well-placed broadside, the tearing shriek of splinters, the gathering swell as of an avalanche when the fore or main came down, the remonstrant sob of the sea, the thud of falling blocks, the rattle of musketry, high-pitched words of command, angry expostulations, curses, chirruping cries from the powder-monkeys, stifled groans from those in pain, moans from the dying, imploring calls for water, shouts of encouragement, shrieks of dismay and despair, unintelligible noises as of earthquakes, blizzards, cartloads of shingle dropped upon shingle, and falling masonry, rumbling sounds that ended in explosions, burrowing sounds that ended in a long wail of agony, creaking sounds as of unoiled hinges, shrill-throated, ear-piercing clamour alternating with clanking, ringing din, discordant janglings, noise as of cannon-balls rolled over vibrant sheets of iron, repeated claps of thunder, sudden blows as of loudly

hanging doors, reverberating echoes, and through all and in all and over all the ringing chime of human cheers from plucky human throats.

Looking through a gun-port, if he cared to take the risk, a seaman might observe the enemy's line, might see the damage it had suffered, might see a flag come down. He might rest his bloodshot eyes for a minute on the tranquil blue of sky and sea, and extend his pity to those who struggled in the water or clambered upon some mighty fragment of wreckage, there to cling in cold and hunger and wretchedness for hours and sometimes for days after the battle was fought and done.

But inboard there was little to be seen; and mercifully so. The pungent smoke hung about the deck in canopies and curtains. It veiled one gun's crew from another. It caressed the beams as with a coverlet. It shrouded the dead. It concealed the living. Little streams might filter across the deck, changing their course as the vessel rolled, and at length unite to form a dreadful pool that lurked in a corner and eddied into bubbles before it rushed in a red spout through the scuppers. But the smoke did its best to hide this too, and often enough succeeded. Nor is Rowlandson's picture, *Fighting the Guns*, a true representation of fact. The dead were not suffered to cumber the deck, nor mutilated bodies left to bleed. Those who fell at their post were thrown instantly overboard, and the waters that closed over Grenville and Drake made their only winding-sheet. Those who were gravely wounded underwent a brief examination. If there was a ray of hope, they were borne below; if the wound was mortal, they were cast into the sea.

It was not, then, a recollection of sickening sights that a sailor carried from a battle. Grateful that his own life had been spared, he spoke in the

cheeriest way of his experiences. "To tell you the truth," wrote a seaman to his father, "when the game began I wished myself at Warnborough with my plough again; but when they had given us one duster and I found myself snug and tight, I set to in good earnest, and thought no more about being killed than if I were at Murrell Green Fair."

But the deafness that set in after a hard fight lasted for three days, and sometimes for four.

Battles at sea varied greatly in length. Some lasted for an hour or two; some did not last so long. Many endured for five hours or six, and a few for twelve or fifteen. Upon occasions an encounter was continued from one day to another; for three, four, or five successive days. It seems almost incredible that powder and shot should have held out for so protracted a struggle. But a ship, though provisioned for five or six months, was armed for three years.



## CHAPTER XI

### TRAFALGAR

*And now the cannons roar  
Along the affrighted shore;  
Our Nelson led the way.  
His ship the "Victory" named,  
Long be that "Victory" famed,  
For victory crowned the day.*

S. J. ARNOLD.

#### I

AFTER the Battle of St. Vincent, the *Victory* took a share in the blockade of the Spanish ships which had escaped into Cadiz Bay. But this was only for a time. At the approach of winter Jervis deemed it wise to send her home with his prizes and shifted his flag into the *Ville de Paris*. The *Victory* reached England in October, and on November 26th was paid off at Chatham. She had deserved well of her country. And her reward was to serve as a prison ship.

Instead of being visited by royalty, she was packed with human outcasts. Instead of being decorated with laurel crowns, she was burdened with a load of unsightly structures which roofed her upper deck.

She was thirty-five years old. According to the standards of to-day, when a ship is reckoned obsolete at fifteen, thirty-five may appear a great age. But it was not so reckoned in 1797. The *Victory* was degraded and put to vile uses, not because she was old or because she was obsolete. A wooden wall did

not become obsolete. At Trafalgar the average age of the British vessels was seventeen years; and if that of the allies was something less, that was only because so many French ships had been captured and new ones built to replace them. And it may almost be added that a wooden wall did not grow old. The *Betsy Cains*, that foundered off Newcastle in 1827, was popularly supposed to be the royal yacht *Mary*, which brought William III to England in 1688. The tradition was incorrect, but not absurd. The old convict ship *Success*, which a few years ago was still exhibiting herself, was built ten years before the Battle of St. Vincent, and in 1897, at the age of 110, sailed from Australia to England rigged as a barque, and leaked but little on the way.

The test of a wooden wall's decrepitude was neither the number of her years nor the fashion of her build, but simply and solely her seaworthiness. Was she tight? Was she staunch and strong? Could she ride out an Atlantic gale? These were the questions to prove her. Now, the *Victory* had seen many years of work in the war of American Independence. Recently she had been through five years of uninterrupted service from Toulon to Cape St. Vincent. She had undergone racks and stresses and cramps. She had been hammered and battered and strained. Jervis sent her home at the approach of winter because he thought her unfit to weather its storms. The Admiralty agreed, and laid her up in the Medway.

This period of degradation lasted throughout 1798, while Napoleon went to Egypt and Nelson destroyed his fleet at the Nile. And it continued throughout 1799. But the *Victory's* name and her fame were not forgotten. Her popularity in no measure declined, and her speed and sea qualities

were often favourably contrasted with those of other vessels. And so one day the news reached Chatham that she was to undergo a complete repair. She was tugged into dry-dock and almost entirely rebuilt. So much new timber, indeed, was charged to her account that it seems doubtful whether there can possibly be any of the 1765 wood left at all. Of structural changes two of importance call for notice. In the first place the stern of the vessel was completely changed. The open stern galleries, where the admiral and captain had formerly been able to take a turn in the open air, were swept away, and the stern itself closed in "flush," that is to say, made flat with ordinary sash-windows. There were good architectural reasons for making the change; but the destruction of these external adjuncts meant a sad loss of beauty; for the stern galleries had been lavishly decorated with sculpture, which included, among other embellishments, figures of Britannia and Neptune, with Tritons and sea-horses, Mercury with his caduceus, Mars with shield and sword, Peace, Plenty, the Four Seasons and the Cardinal Virtues, to say nothing of Cupids, sea-birds, festoons of fruit and flowers, ensigns of nobility and emblematical scrolls.

Such ruthless iconoclasm in the stern made the over-elaborate figurehead seem unsuited to the ship's plainer lines. Accordingly, the sculptured gallery forward, described on a previous page, was not again set in order and restored, but, on the contrary, swept entirely away. In its place came something very much less ambitious and ornate. The trophy this time comprised an oval shield with the Royal Arms thereon; and above the achievement the Crown Imperial, and below it the scroll and motto *Dieu et mon droit*. For supporters the shield had on either side not the familiar lion and unicorn, but

two graceful Cupids or amorini painted ivory white.<sup>1</sup>

The reconstruction of the *Victory* cost a fair round sum. It also took time. The whole of 1800 was consumed, and the spring of 1801. If the repairs had been less extensive, the *Victory* might have been finished in time for Copenhagen. But although she was denied a part in the first two of Nelson's great victories, she had renewed her youth and her strength and her beauty just in time for the greatest and last.

In 1803 England renewed her war with France, in order to curb the world-wide ambitions of Napoleon and anticipate his designs against herself. Nelson was named for the Mediterranean command; and as if a return to the scene of his triumphal exploits was not satisfaction enough, his cup of joy was filled to overflowing, and his dream of younger days realized, when the *Victory* was chosen to carry his flag.

While other men thought, Nelson acted. No sooner was he appointed to the Mediterranean than he was gone. He waited for nothing. He flew to his station on the wings of duty, and arrived breathless in the *Amphion* frigate. The *Victory*, speedy though she was, could not keep pace with him. She followed, however, as quickly as she could at the more sober gait incumbent on a first-rate, and on Saturday, July 30, 1803, the admiral's flag, white at the fore, was hoisted by Captain Hardy. On the next day Nelson himself came aboard, and Hardy helped him to hang pictures in his cabin.

<sup>1</sup> When the "Epilogue" of this book was written, it was generally believed that the stern galleries were not swept away until after Trafalgar; see below, p. 243.

The original appearance of both bow and stern (1765-1801) can best be studied in the scale model of the ship graciously presented to the *Victory* Museum at Portsmouth by His Majesty the King.

There was no chance of entering Toulon in 1803, as the *Victory* had entered ten years before. The fleet had to stand sentry outside and maintain a rigid blockade. The work was exacting and monotonous. The only change was from the deep level blue of the summer sea to the creamy grey rollers of winter. The only variety was a cruise in search of provisions, the only excitement a storm. If the enemy escaped, the work of the fleet was undone; its vigilance was nullified. And so long as the enemy were securely imprisoned, there was not the faintest hope of a fight. So the dreary time went by. Hours turned into days, days into weeks, weeks into months, and months into years. And still Nelson's fleet were afloat outside Toulon, watchful as ever, patient and uncomplaining. The officers happy and studious, the men well fed and lusty. The ships as tidy as they could be without, as clean as new sixpences within. The health of the fleet good, the doctors inactive. The wooden walls a city afloat, ruled by a king of men—a city better cared for, better governed, better ordered than the city based on granite foundations which it daily kept in awe. Only one cause of uneasiness disturbed the British fleet, its admirals, its captains, its lieutenants, its warrant-officers, its petty officers and men—the fear lest their ship in some respect should be found wanting and sent away home. Country lanes with the trees in full leaf, wayside inns, fields of golden corn, cosy firesides, and cups of mead—all these awaited them in England. But nobody craved for them. Men only asked to be with Nelson, afloat on the fathomless, featureless sea, with the closed door of Toulon to watch.

A glimpse of life on board the *Victory* at this time is afforded by the diary of one of Nelson's surgeons, Dr. Gillespie, who may here be quoted.

"At seven, breakfast is announced in the Admiral's cabin, where Lord Nelson, Rear-Admiral Murray the Captain of the Fleet, Captain Hardy commander of the *Victory*, the chaplain,<sup>1</sup> secretary,<sup>2</sup> one or two officers of the ship, and your humble servant, assemble and breakfast on tea, hot rolls, toast, cold tongue, etcetera. . . . Between the hours of seven and two there is plenty of time for business, study, writing, and exercise. . . . At two o'clock a band of music plays till within a quarter to three, when the drum beats the tune called *The Roast Beef of Old England*, to announce the Admiral's dinner, which is served up exactly at three o'clock, and which generally consists of three courses and a dessert of the choicest fruit, together with three or four of the best wines, champagne and claret not excepted. . . . Coffee and liqueurs close the dinner about half-past four or five o'clock, after which the company generally walk the deck, where the band of music plays for near an hour. At six o'clock tea is announced, when the company again assemble in the Admiral's cabin, where tea is served up before seven o'clock, and as we are inclined, the party continue to converse with his Lordship, who at this time generally unbends himself . . . and is very communicative. At eight a rummer of punch with cake and biscuit is served up, soon after which we wish the Admiral a good night, who is generally in bed before nine o'clock."

The blockade of Toulon lasted a year and a half, from the middle of 1803 to the beginning of 1805. Two things conspired to bring it to a close—the completion of Napoleon's preparations for the conquest of England and the smallness of Nelson's fleet.

Napoleon's plan of campaign for 1805, though so immense a work of art, was so simple in its

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Scott.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Scott.

outline that a word or two will suffice for its description. An immense army with Napoleon at its head was to take up its position at Boulogne ready to cross the Channel. All details as to armament and transport Napoleon himself undertook. But more than this was required. What was absolutely essential to the success of the venture was an overwhelmingly strong escort of battleships, such as had occupied the Channel in 1779. This overwhelmingly strong fleet existed on paper, but nowhere else. To mobilize it, to materialize it, Napoleon needed to unite all the separate squadrons at his disposal in the harbours of France and Spain. Now, he knew perfectly well that the union of French and Spanish fleets was a matter of no ordinary difficulty. The great rally of 1759 had been spoiled by Hawke and Boscawen. The great rally of 1797 had been frustrated at St. Vincent by Jervis. Was there any ground for hope that the rally of 1805 would prove any more successful than its predecessors? Napoleon certainly thought so. He explained, at least to his own satisfaction, that the experiments of 1759 and 1797 had been ruined by a silly and obvious mistake—the choice of Brest as a meeting-place. The meeting-place of the squadrons, he argued (and argued with wisdom), must not be in European waters at all. Where, then, was it to be? That was the secret confided to all his commanders of squadrons. That was the secret which all must strive to keep from the knowledge of the English. If they discovered it, the scheme was spoiled; but if the secret were well kept and the squadrons, uniting, returned and occupied the English Channel, then London was doomed to the fate of Milan, Mantua, and Vienna.

The French admirals, however, had first to escape from the English fleets blockading them. The word “escape” is used advisedly. Napoleon was very

careful to show that he wanted nothing heroic till the rendezvous was reached and the rally completed. Admiral Villeneuve commanded in chief at Toulon. His was the task to elude the watch of Nelson. Now it is very doubtful whether he could have done this but for the smallness of Nelson's fleet. During the eighteen months that the blockade was maintained, the number of English ships averaged ten. Nelson, with his mind always bent upon the needs of battle, was convinced that his first and foremost duty was to keep these ten together. He might have divided his contingent, and given one-half a holiday while he kept the other half before Toulon. But this he felt was to leave hostages with fortune. He therefore, as a general rule, kept the fleet entire before the town, and, when occasion for a visit to harbour became too urgent to be ignored, he carried his whole force away with him, leaving frigates to watch and report.

On January 19, 1805, the *Victory* and her sisters were putting themselves in trim at an anchorage between Sardinia and Corsica. Suddenly the frigates came within speaking distance with their tell-tale signals flying.

The Toulon fleet was at sea!

Nelson was in an agony! The *Victory* weighed with lightning speed. But where was she to go? Nelson urged her from this point to that, like a huntsman who has lost his way. He put a ring round the Mediterranean; went to Alexandria and back again. But all to no purpose—the French were not to be found. One thing only was apparent. Egypt was not this time their destination. But what, then, were they after? One grain of information Nelson thought would have been cheap at a thousand pounds. A great game of chess between two master players. Napoleon had made his move, a cunning



move. What did it mean? There was really no saying. If Nelson was ignorant, who else should know?

Meanwhile the roughness of the weather drove Villeneuve back into harbour. And there he was when the *Victory*, on March 12th, returned to her station. But there was little comfort in that. The *Victory*, after her journeyings, must once more visit port; and the moment her back was turned, Villeneuve would be out again. The problem stared Nelson in the face more impudently. That was all.

Villeneuve broke covert for the second time at the end of March. The *Phæbe* frigate spied him, and, knowing where the *Victory* was, sped away to tell Nelson the news. Could she tell him where Villeneuve was gone? Alas! no. No one could tell him. Once more he posted from place to place, finding no news, finding no rest; hailing every vessel that passed, every brig, every barque, every coaster. No; Napoleon's secret was a secret still. Not a word from anyone.

The Mediterranean traversed, Nelson set his face to Gibraltar. But the winds were dead foul and held him back. Here was "check" indeed. Was Napoleon winning the game?

Gibraltar at last! The 4th of May. And certain news. Villeneuve had passed the Strait—passed through the Strait and into the Atlantic—more than a month ago. "Disappointment," wrote Nelson on May 10th, "has worn me to a skeleton."

And now where was the *Victory* to turn? To Brest? or Corunna? or Cadiz? or Rochefort?

Or should she stay where she was? The Mediterranean, after all, was Nelson's station. Had he any right to leave it because certain French ships were no longer there? "It is my duty to follow them to the Antipodes," he said, "should I believe that to be their destination."

What was their destination?

Where was the secret hiding-place chosen by Napoleon? Where was the new armada to mobilize? From what mysterious ocean isle were the ships to emerge? Was it in Asia or in Africa? In China or Peru?

Martinique. Fort Royal in Martinique. On the other side of the Atlantic.

It was a long way to go, certainly. Villeneuve thought so, and he was a good judge. But he reached his destination unmolested. He had a reputation for good luck. He had escaped alive from the Battle of the Nile. That was a singular piece of good luck. He had slipped through Nelson's fingers twice. Another piece of good luck. He had passed Gibraltar unchallenged. Good luck again. Round his flag were gathered eighteen ships of the line. Presently, as the other squadrons came in, cautiously stealing to the rendezvous, his numbers would increase: eighteen, twenty-eight, thirty-eight, forty-eight, fifty-eight, sixty-eight. And then, with all the sail they could carry, eastward ho! to the camp at Boulogne. The days slipped by tranquilly. There was nothing to do. Nothing more could be done till other squadrons arrived.

On June 4th there came another squadron. It numbered ten ships of the line—ten ships of the line that steered their course not to Fort Royal but to the roadstead of Barbados. And the stately vessel that led them in carried a red cross flag at the fore topmast head, and on her breast the arms of England's king. Truly, one of the most triumphant days in the *Victory's* career. She had carried her master across the wide Atlantic, never stopping to take breath. She had run the French to earth. She had ferreted out Napoleon's scheme. Nose down on the scent, she had followed his fleet. She had unravelled his

intricate skein of intrigue. Without a thing to guide her, without a clue to help, she had found his secret hiding-place. It was a hiding-place no longer. The French ships had only just begun to assemble. And here was herself in the midst of them. Good cause for laughter, was there not? And Napoleon's plan was ruined now. Good cause for congratulation. His great project was all overturned. He could break up his camp and march from Boulogne. There would be no invasion of England, thank God, in 1805.

Of the remainder of this great hunting-piece there are two views, that of the huntsman and that of the spectators. And first, that of the huntsman. When Nelson arrived at Barbados he found news awaiting him. Word had come from General Brereton, Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in the Leeward Isles, that Villeneuve had been seen from St. Lucia passing southward with twenty-eight sail. Definite news! The huntsman is not bound to take notice of every piece of information, however keen the bearer of intelligence, however assertive and however disinterested. But the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces! An unimpeachable authority. Nelson was off at once. Tobago, Trinidad. He searched the islands to the south of St. Lucia. He searched, and searched in vain. And as he did so, the French were sighted off Antigua, right away to the north. General Brereton's intelligence was false. The moment that Villeneuve heard of Nelson's arrival, he had set out for home again. He was hastening now to recross the Atlantic with 360 miles' start. "If either General Brereton could not have wrote, or his look-out had been blind, nothing could have prevented my fighting them on June 6th." Such was Nelson's opinion, and there is little enough reason to question it.

There was no use in complaining. Villeneuve was gone, and the chase must be continued. But hearts sank in the *Victory* and spirits drooped. The little figure that daily walked the quarter-deck and hourly asked if there was any sail in sight was an object of compassion to everyone on board. To cross the whole breadth of the wide Atlantic, to rout the fox from his lair and then by one's own friends to be prevented from killing him—it was too bad. It was too unkind. It was too cruel. "It has almost broke my heart," wrote Nelson to Evan Nepean on June 16th. And we find five days later the following pathetic entry in his private diary: "Midnight. Nearly calm. Saw three planks, which I think came from the French fleet. Very miserable—which is very foolish."

That is one picture—the huntsman's view. And then there is the other. The view of the spectators—the men of England, the Admiralty, the people, the Cabinet. Lookers-on, they say, see most of the game. What had they seen and heard? They had seen their country in the direst peril. They had seen the danger removed. They had seen Napoleon's ambitions mount up like flame. They had seen them dissolve in smoke. They had seen the Toulon fleet, obedient to the Emperor's behest, depart on some mission of mischief. They had watched it vanish behind a veil of mystery. They had watched and waited: and the veil had thickened and become impenetrable; while on the other side of the Channel the legions of France had exercised themselves in the daily routine of embarkation in the boats that were to bring them across. And then out of the mists of conjecture they had seen the fleet of Villeneuve re-emerge, flying for its life: eighteen strong in battleships alone, and flying as if the furies were behind it; panting, pallid, and exhausted; a hunted

thing, an object of pity. And they had also seen the faithful pack of Nelson, ten of them—no more—in breathless hot pursuit. They had seen in their dreams the eagles of Napoleon pushing their way along the Kentish roads. They had heard in their imaginings the cry “Vive l’Empereur!” ring through the streets of London. But the nightmare was past, and with waking day they heard the retreat of the “Army of England” as it marched away from Boulogne.

What welcomes for the *Victory* when towards the end of August she dropped anchor at Spithead! She had sailed from England two years before, a vessel steeped in glorious traditions; none nobler, none more excellent; rich in the names of those who had held command in her, rich in the names of battles she had fought. But when she returned, she was wreathed with the blessings of a grateful nation, she was garlanded with praise. Not Drake’s *Revenge* that staggered the Armada and stood to bay at Flores; not Anson’s *Centurion* that circled the globe and rifled the Spanish coffers; not Hawke’s *Royal George* that fought amid rocks in the teeth of a winter gale; not one of these could match the ship that had saved England from Napoleon, that had wrestled a bout with the master of strategy and floored him at his own game.

Victory!

Hitherto the name had been hers as a gift. Now she had made it her own.

## II

For the first fortnight of September, for the first fortnight after Napoleon’s departure from Boulogne, Nelson and the *Victory* rested—Nelson at his Surrey home and the *Victory* at Spithead. But by degrees the Admiral’s view of the situation became the

accepted one. His work was not finished—not finished, at least, in a thoroughgoing British fashion.

Villeneuve must be destroyed!

As soon as definite information was obtainable, as soon as it was known that Villeneuve was in Cadiz with a formidable fleet of French and Spanish ships, Nelson was summoned by the Admiralty to London. The colloquy was of the briefest, and on September 13th Nelson travelled post-haste down the Portsmouth road. He left his chaise and slept a few hours at the inn at Burford Bridge, then on again and into Portsmouth on the morning of the 14th. He stopped at the "George" to breakfast, and as he did so the news of his coming got abroad. The people thronged into High Street till the roadway was packed with them. The *Victory* was lying out at St. Helens, and people expected the Admiral to take boat at the stairs near the High Street Semaphore. But Nelson left his hotel at the back, and from Penny Street passed into Green Row and so to Southsea. The crowds got wind of this and raced to cut him off. They swarmed round him as he entered his boat in company with Mr. Canning. And as he pushed off, they swarmed into the water in order to say good-bye. "Had I two arms," he said to them, "I could shake hands with more of you."

And so again he came aboard the *Victory*, and again his white flag was hoisted at the fore. He sailed the next day, September 15th, in company with the *Euryalus* frigate, Captain Henry Blackwood.

When the British fleet, already at Cadiz and busily blockading that port, heard that Nelson was approaching in the *Victory*, joy filled the hearts of all of them, from Admiral Collingwood downwards. They resolved to greet him in a right royal fashion.

But, as they did so, the *Euryalus* arrived as courier. "Vice-Admiral Nelson's compliments and no salutes!" Disappointing, very. But a way was quickly found. As every commander was free to paint his ship in the mode he fancied best, Collingwood and his captains began painting their ships in the manner that Nelson preferred. And when on September 28th the *Victory* arrived, she found all her sister-ships gowned like herself. Chequerwise, it may be said. Not black and white, as for a century after Waterloo, and as so many pictures show, but black and yellow, black and varnish-colour; the black diversified by patches of red when gun-port lids were raised; the yellow always interrupted by darker squares—of shadow, if the ports were open, of paint, if they were shut.

When everyone had come aboard the *Victory* to pay respects and when everyone had gone again, Nelson set to work in deadly earnest to induce his enemies to come out of port. Admiral Villeneuve, he thought, might be persuaded to do so because he was not at his own home. At Cadiz he boarded in Spanish lodgings, and very expensive lodgings they were likely to prove, with the whole coast under blockade. Sooner or later, if he were given an opportunity, he might be trusted to return to Toulon. In March he had come out of harbour, taking advantage of the absence of the English fleet and ignoring the English frigates. He must be tempted to do so again. He must not really be allowed to escape. But he must be allowed to think himself free to escape. To turn his thoughts in the desired direction was Nelson's purpose. With this end in view he had forbidden salutes, to conceal his own arrival. And now, at his order, the bulk of his fleet retired, not ten or twenty or twenty-five miles, but fifty miles from shore. The frigates, under Black-

wood's charge, were (as at Toulon) to stay near the harbour and watch the allied fleet as a cat watches a mouse. But between the frigates and the battle fleet four of his swiftest sail of the line were set at intervals like telegraph-posts, to pick up Blackwood's news from his signal flags and pass it on, like a lightning flash, to the *Victory* out at sea.

In the period of waiting Nelson made a further small change in the appearance of his ships. The masts, as it has been said, derived part of their strength from hoops or bands of iron. These hoops, blackened in the British Navy, were blackened in the French and Spanish as well. Nelson therefore gave orders that all ships of his should paint their mast-hoops yellow: and thus he provided diversion for dull days and a token for the hour of battle.

On Friday, October 18th, the wind, which for some days had been westerly, shifted round to the east. "The combined fleet," wrote Nelson in his private log, "cannot have better weather to come out of port."

The next day, Saturday, about half-past nine in the morning, the telegraph-post *Mars*, nearest member of the intelligence department, sent to the *Victory* the joyful tidings, "Enemy coming out of harbour!" Nelson, acting on his conviction that Villeneuve would run for the Strait of Gibraltar, instantly signalled his whole fleet to chase to the south-east. Two hours after midday came a confirmatory message, "Enemy at sea!" But the wind turning southward made progress slow.

All through Saturday night the fleet struggled forward, and the *Victory* at daybreak on Sunday found herself at the mouth of the Gut, midway between Cape Spartel and Cape Trafalgar, a battle-field well known to her of old. The weather seemed broken. There was a good deal of rain, and the



wind was at south-south-west. As soon as it was light enough for signals to be read, Blackwood sent word that Villeneuve had struggled hard against the adverse wind, but had been successfully cut off. Disappointed in his object, he had turned about, and at present was making northwards.

The English fleet flung itself on the same tack and followed with all speed. At noon the wind increased to a gale, and on board the *Victory* much apprehension was felt lest the combined fleet should return into harbour. But later the weather improved somewhat, and the deluges of rain ceased to descend. Nelson came out for a walk on the poop, and seeing a knot of midshipmen eagerly discussing the situation, he turned towards them and said, "This day or to-morrow will be a fortunate one for you, young men," referring to the customary promotions after battle. At five o'clock in the afternoon Blackwood was near enough to the enemy to count them. Villeneuve's fleet was not yet actually visible from the *Victory*, but the frigates told her with the utmost exactitude in what direction to steer.

This they continued to do with untiring skill throughout that Sunday night, using lanterns, rockets, and flares. Villeneuve might double and bend and twist—and he wriggled hard to escape—but they kept him in view with their cat-like eyes, and when he wore, they wore. And when they wore, up went the blue lights, and Nelson wore as well. And so when Monday morning broke, October 21st, there from the *Victory's* deck was to be seen a glorious, thrilling sight: Villeneuve's fleet, easily discernible (though still twelve miles away), thirty-three sail of the line—no less—sailing south on the starboard tack.

## III

It has been seen on a previous page that in the majority of battles at sea the opposing vessels were drawn up in lines parallel to one another, that the ships nearer the wind bore up in line abreast (for otherwise the parallel lines would never have met) and hauled their wind—that is, turned again into line ahead when they came within gunshot of the foe. It has also been seen that at Cape St. Vincent the lines were not parallel, and the attacking ships did not bear up in line abreast or do any of the ordinary things. In short, though the majority of battles conformed more or less to a definite pattern, the exceptional battle was irregular and dispensed with ordinary rules. To which class of encounter did Nelson's masterpiece belong?

Trafalgar conformed to rules in part, and in part dispensed with them. Its nature was twofold. Elements apparently irreconcilable were combined by Nelson into a single plan which he modestly termed his Memorandum. The original document in the Admiral's own handwriting may be seen at the British Museum. Here for the moment it is necessary to dissociate the two ideas which it welds together.

The "regular" part of Nelson's plan, which he might have taken from any pattern-book or treatise on Tactics, was an assault upon the enemy's rear. For this purpose he designed a separate squadron, which he handed over to the independent management of Admiral Collingwood. The enemy had thirty-three ships. The rear might therefore be taken to comprise one-third of them—say twelve ships in all. To attack the twelve rearmost of the enemy's ships in the customary parallel formation, this was Collingwood's task. To make it complete, and the

destruction of the enemy certain, Nelson gave his partner fifteen ships, a preponderance of twenty-five per cent. over the allied rear.

Now Collingwood, the hardest hitter in the fleet, with fifteen sail of the line was morally certain to dispose of an enemy who were blessed with no more than twelve. But the allies numbered thirty-three: what of the other twenty-one? Was Villeneuve a fool? Was he not rather the chosen of Napoleon?—one of the ablest, one of the cleverest flag-officers afloat? Could he not turn his fleet about and bring his centre and van to deliver the ships that Collingwood threatened, and so stultify Collingwood's onslaught?

He could. But to prevent him from doing so was the business of the remaining twelve English ships, which Nelson grouped into a squadron for himself. And how was a little squadron of twelve to contain the whole of the enemy's van and the whole of the enemy's centre? The answer to that question Nelson did not formulate beforehand. No ordinary rules would serve his purpose. No treatise on Tactics would help. He must deal with difficulties as difficulties arose, just as Jervis had done at St. Vincent. "The Commander-in-Chief," so read the Memorandum, "will endeavour to take care that the movements of the second in command are *as little interrupted as is possible.*"

Such was the scheme. Nelson was to occupy the attention of the allied centre and van while Collingwood destroyed the allied rear.

In a letter home the author of the Memorandum wrote: "When I came to explain to them the 'Nelson Touch' it was like an electric shock. Some shed tears; all approved. 'It was new—it was singular—it was simple!' And from admirals downward it was repeated, 'It must succeed, if ever they will allow us to get at them!'"

Simple as it appeared to Nelson and his captains, the plan of attack at the Battle of Trafalgar nevertheless remained a vexed question for one hundred and eight years, and it is not really difficult to discover the reason. Nelson stated clearly enough the object which his own squadron would keep in view. He did not state how that object would be accomplished. When the battle was over, he was no longer alive to explain what he had done; and the Trafalgar dispatch was written by Collingwood. Now Collingwood was busy throughout the battle, not in watching Nelson's squadron but in commanding his own. Even if he had been present on board the *Victory*, his modesty was such that he would never have taken upon himself to expound the "Nelson Touch." He wrote of the battle as if his readers were as conversant with the Memorandum as he was himself. He never returned to England after the battle, but after weary watches died at sea.

Robbed of their chief authorities, students of the battle fell back upon an analysis of the Memorandum itself, which they interpreted by the light of such logs as they could procure and the accounts of such eye-witnesses as wrote letters or journals descriptive of the fight. One log was found to be inconsistent with another log. One eye-witness's account was flatly contradicted by another's. Logs did not agree with eye-witnesses; nor eye-witnesses with logs. And logs and eye-witnesses both belied the plain testimony of Nelson's written word. Finally, out of a hotch-potch of conflicting evidence emerged what may be described as the "Traditional View."

This "Traditional View" is illustrated by almost all printed plans of the battle.<sup>1</sup> Alike in naval histories, encyclopædias, lives of Nelson, and school textbooks, the diagrams show the two English squadrons like

<sup>1</sup> There are several notable exceptions.

parallel arrows flying to one target, the target being the centre of the Franco-Spanish line.

The "Traditional View" occupied the field throughout the nineteenth century, but in 1899 it was assailed by Admiral Colomb, the author of *Naval Warfare*. His attack led to long dialectical campaigning and a veritable war of words. Some writers, with great show of reason, contended that if the "Traditional View" was correct, Nelson's Memorandum must at the twelfth hour have been abandoned and a strangely inferior mode of attack adopted in its place. Some convinced themselves that Nelson would never have abandoned a pre-arranged plan without informing his captains, and proceeded to prove to their own satisfaction that the Memorandum was carried out in every particular. At the opposite end of the tourney ground were moderate men, who fought for the "Traditional View," because the bulk of the evidence seemed to favour it; and fair-minded men, who in the interests of historical truth and accuracy deprecated any attempt to enhance Nelson's reputation by any process of special pleading.

Disputes continued until April 1912, when Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg, on taking up his appointment as First Sea Lord, nominated a Committee of Inquiry.<sup>1</sup> The members of the Committee, regulating their conduct by the critical standard of modern scholarship, decided that the only evidence of value was contemporary evidence, and that the fullest contemporary evidence extant

<sup>1</sup> Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge, G.C.B., author of *The Art of Naval Warfare*, etc. (Chairman); Admiral Sir Reginald Custance, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., C.V.O., author of *The Ship of the Line in Battle*, etc.; Professor Sir Charles Firth, D.C.L., LL.D., Regius Professor of History in the University of Oxford, author of *Cromwell's Army*, etc.; and Mr. W. G. Perrin, O.B.E., Admiralty Librarian (Secretary).

was the evidence supplied by the ships' log-books. The records of all the ships were hunted up. Of alternative manuscripts the best alone was accepted.<sup>1</sup> Reliable documents were transcribed and printed without altering a jot or a tittle. And from the volume of evidence thus adduced, a map was prepared by an expert from the Hydrographical Department of the Navy.<sup>2</sup> The map and the charts upon which it was based were the first ever drawn to exact scale, and from them the Committee obtained a scientific and trustworthy survey of the entire battlefield.<sup>3</sup>

By the aid of this map they re-examined their authorities and discovered that contemporary evidence was not spoiled, as many had predicted, by wild discrepancies, but, on the contrary, presented a rough sailor-like unanimity on which they could build a solid structure of unassailable truth.

The Report of the Committee was published in 1913, appropriately enough on the anniversary of Trafalgar.<sup>4</sup> Its findings may be summarized as follows.

. . . . .

About six o'clock on the morning of October 21st the Franco-Spanish fleet was first discovered. At that moment the English ships were not in any particular formation. Nelson therefore lost not a moment in signalling to them what they should do. They were

<sup>1</sup> No conclusive contemporary evidence was forthcoming in the case of the *Defence*, *Defiance*, and *Thunderer*; and the evidence in the case of the *Revenge* was conflicting.

<sup>2</sup> Captain Tizard, C.B., R.N., F.R.S., formerly Assistant Hydrographer.

<sup>3</sup> The position of the Franco-Spanish ships was ascertained from the work of Colonel Desbrière, who had already performed for the allied fleet labours identical with those of the Committee.

<sup>4</sup> Blue Book, Cd. 7120.

to group themselves at once in the two separate squadrons already arranged for, and then to make sail in an easterly direction, forming themselves in line ahead as best they could. The wind being somewhat to the north of west put Nelson's squadron on the left of the advance and Collingwood's on the right.

The Franco-Spanish ships were still busily occupied in an attempt to form their line which had been begun under cover of night. They were, as we have seen, advancing southward on the starboard tack. Their rearmost vessels were just drawing clear of the entrance to Cadiz harbour. As the eastern sky brightened behind them, they had an excellent view of the British fleet. Villeneuve, watching from the deck of the *Bucentaure*, saw, as it seemed, a confused medley of ships bearing down upon him. As he continued to watch, the medley resolved itself into two masses. The two masses in turn became two roughly-shaped wedges. The wedges transformed themselves at length into irregular columns. And the columns finally straightened themselves out into something like lines ahead. To him the question that propounded itself was: "What do these twin squadrons intend to do?" His soldierly instinct warned him that they intended to mass an attack on his rear and at the same time cut him off from Cadiz. Now if his rear were assailed, it would be a matter of grave difficulty in light airs for his centre and van to bring deliverance. Therefore he signalled his fleet to go about immediately, so that his rear, being converted into his van, might have the original centre and the new rear astern of it for support.

The reversal of the order of the allied fleet was begun about eight o'clock and completed about ten or soon afterwards. The evolution was beset by difficulties, but, on the whole, was creditably per-

formed. Some ships were bound to get out of place, and the wind, veering to the west, changed the whole array from a straight line to a bow-shaped curve. But these were details which time could rectify. Yet, although the manœuvre reflects credit on Villeneuve, there can be no doubt that it materially aided Nelson's plan. Villeneuve's rear was now opposite Collingwood's squadron, which had been created to destroy it.

As he advanced to accomplish his fell purpose, Collingwood gave the necessary orders to bring his division parallel to the last twelve ships of the enemy. Owing to the curvature of the allies' array, it was not necessary for the British vessels to draw into line abreast. What they had to do was to form a line of bearing, each ship steering the same course as before, but increasing her speed until she had her next ahead bearing north-east of her. Even this modified form of deployment required that the leading vessels should "mark time" until those astern could draw up. But Collingwood, who led the attack himself, paused not even for a moment. He recalled the words of the Council of War as they listened to the plan of attack! "It must succeed, if ever they will allow us to get at them!" To get at them! That was the "Nelson Touch." Content with signalling this ship and that to hurry and make more sail, he sped away onwards without waiting. Therefore on an accurate plan of Trafalgar we must not expect to see the lee squadron engaging in serried phalanx line abreast. Faster vessels at the head of the column were completing their curve parallel to the foe. Slower vessels astern still formed an irregular trail. But the scope and effect of Collingwood's attack was in virtual accord with the specified scheme laid down by the Memorandum.

Meanwhile Nelson, who, with twelve ships only,



was to prevent nearly double that number of opponents from interrupting Collingwood, gave no order of deployment to the ships astern of him. He continued to keep on in line ahead. Regarding his squadron as a spear, we may think of it as poised and aimed at the Franco-Spanish van. Why did he keep on in line ahead? And why did he threaten the allied van?

By advancing into battle as Jervis had done, he threatened what Jervis had threatened. He looked as if he meant to pierce the enemy's array, and the enemy braced their nerves and stiffened their sinews—in other words, made their line more rigidly linear—just as he meant them to do. They must not be allowed to use their limbs, for by using them they might interrupt Collingwood.

He threatened their van in preference to their centre, for a threatened centre might recall the van to its assistance, and that would be to interrupt Collingwood. But a threatened van was sure to move on, knowing that the centre, as in duty bound, was advancing to its support. And the centre, following in the wake of the van, moved away from the place where the blow was to fall, leaving Collingwood uninterrupted.

#### IV

After this general review of the mode of attack up to the time when the first shot was fired, we are free to consider the individual part which the *Victory* played in the battle.

Nelson, we have seen, was at work by six o'clock. Mounting the poop, he had a good look at the foe, and gave the necessary orders already referred to. For a time he watched his own ships anxiously, noting their obedience to his signals. As he did so,

the formation which he desired began slowly but surely to disclose itself. Collingwood's ship drew alongside of his own, and over the starboard bulwarks loomed large through the morning haze. The wind was light, with flaws from the land, and there was a heavy ground-swell. The enemy for the most part were under topsails and top-gallants. The *Victory* had been carrying her fore course and top-sails. But now she shook out all her reefs, and set royals and studding-sails. There being still twelve miles of sea to be crossed, Nelson retired to his cabin again, and occupied the short interval of leisure with business and private prayers.

Meanwhile the drums rolled, the bos'n and his mates piped the call at every hatchway, and the ship was made ready to engage. In addition to the usual arrangements, the boats on the quarters, lest they should interfere with the guns, were lowered and towed astern. All was quickly set in train. But the *Victory* moved slowly through the water. In pursuit of Villeneuve she had made on occasion her ten knots, but now the wind was so light that with stunsails out she made less than three.<sup>1</sup> This slow progress promised a heavy casualty-list when the enemy opened fire. At eight o'clock the weather looked dull and cloudy and there were still nine miles to be gone. Presently Nelson came forth from his cabin again and went the rounds of the ship. He was accompanied by Captain Hardy, by Captain Blackwood of the *Euryalus* (who had come aboard for final orders), by Dr. Beatty (surgeon of the *Victory*), and by others. As he proceeded from gun deck to gun deck he often stopped and spoke, exhorting the gunners not to waste a shot, but to

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Beatty thinks that, if there had been more wind, the whole of the enemy's fleet would have been captured, and Nelson's life would have been saved.

take careful aim and make sure of hitting. He also expressed himself to the officers as highly pleased with all their arrangements.

Rounds finished, Nelson repaired again to the poop, where he kept a watchful eye upon the enemy. Villeneuve's ships on the horizon still looked no larger than a row of model yachts, but through a glass it was becoming increasingly possible to distinguish one from another. Nelson walked about the poop in company with Hardy and Blackwood. The marines stood on either side with small-arms ready, while Pasco and his signalmen were busy with vocabulary and flags. Suddenly, in his eager way, Nelson turned to Blackwood with an exclamation. "Now," said he, "I'll amuse the fleet with a signal. Mr. Pasco, I wish to say to the fleet, 'England confides that every man will do his duty.' " The signal-lieutenant asked if he might substitute "expects" for "confides," because "confides" was not in the vocabulary. Nelson readily agreed, and at 11.40 the flags began to ascend.<sup>1</sup> They were hoisted by signalman John Roome, and we have it on the authority of Captain Blackwood that as ship after ship of both squadrons received the *Victory's* message, the thunder of enthusiastic cheering rolled in echoes down the line.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Trafalgar Report*, p. cii.

<sup>2</sup> In a letter to *The Times* (May 12, 1908) Mr. W. G. Perrin, the Admiralty Librarian, pointed out that the accepted heraldry of Nelson's last signal was incorrect. The flags used for commemorations of October 21st were those of the "1799 Code," because this was generally believed to have done duty till 1808; but the Admiralty archives showed conclusively that the 1799 Code was discarded not in 1808, but in 1804. It was discarded and new flags adopted in time for Trafalgar. According to the correct code, the flags are as follows:—

o. Square, white and blue diagonal.

1. Square, white with blue St. George's Cross.

Nelson next bade Pasco hoist signal No. 16, "Engage the enemy more closely." The *Victory*, it must be understood, was not yet in action. But this signal with Nelson was no ordinary signal. It was to him a mascot and a talisman; a remedy for evils, an exhortation to waverers. He liked to have it ready in good time, and gave Pasco strict orders to keep it flying. So the flags were lashed to the main top-gallant, and there they remained until the spar was shot away.

The *Victory*, of course, carried her admiral's flag, white at the fore.<sup>1</sup> But in the disposition of her other colours Nelson made certain changes. That in the ensign was inevitable. The fleet was not divided into van, centre, and rear, but into two independent squadrons. The use of three colours had lost significance, and Nelson ordered all ships of the fleet to wear the white ensign only; thereby anticipating—and in a manner dictating—the usage of to-day. The *Victory* was properly entitled to the red ensign; but Nelson chose the white to match his flag. As to Union Jacks, he had two of them, and hoisted in conspicuous places, one at the main topmast stay, the other at the fore top-gallant stay, so that the

2. Square, blue with white centre (Blue Peter).
3. Square, blue with yellow St. Andrew's Cross.
4. Square, white and red quarters.
5. Square, yellow, red, yellow, horizontal.
6. Square, blue, white, red, horizontal.
7. Square, blue, white, blue, perpendicular.
8. Square, white.
9. Square, yellow and blue perpendicular.

Repeat. Square, black, yellow, black, horizontal.

By the aid of these colours and the figures given on page 131, the message can be correctly illuminated.

<sup>1</sup> It was not hoisted, nor was that of Collingwood, nor that of Rear-Admiral Lord Radstock in the *Britannia*, fourth astern of the *Victory*; nor was the ensign of any ship displayed until the enemy opened fire.

*Victory* in respect of her nationality was not likely to be mistaken.<sup>1</sup>

It was at ten minutes to twelve that the actual fighting began, the wind being light, the sea smooth, and the sun shining on the freshly painted sides of the combined fleet. The *Fougueux* fired the first shot, and the *Royal Sovereign* was not long in answering. As soon as Collingwood found his range, Nelson ordered all who were not on duty on the *Victory's* upper deck to leave the poop and forecastle and repair to their proper quarters. About the same time Captain Blackwood took his leave, after a vain attempt to persuade the Admiral to come and conduct the fight in safety from the *Euryalus*.

About ten minutes past twelve one of the ships of the combined fleet, in a favourable position for doing so, fired a single shot at the *Victory* to try the range. The *Victory* was just moving, no more, making, perhaps, one and a half knots, and the shot fell short. After two or three minutes the trial was repeated. The *Victory* was by this time a mile and a quarter distant, and the second shot fell alongside. The third flew over the ship. The fourth and fifth did the same. But the sixth shot made a gash in the main top-gallant sail, showing that the range at last was found. There was a moment or two of intense silence, and then seven or eight of the enemy's ships opened fire, pouring in their broadsides. The *Victory*, ignoring them, still moved forward; solemn, stately, silent, and alone. A round-shot, flying across the deck, killed Nelson's secretary, John Scott, as he conversed with Captain Hardy. Aided by a seaman, Captain Adair of the marines tried to move the body before Nelson could see it.

<sup>1</sup> One of these was used as a pall at Nelson's funeral, and a fragment of it may still be seen at the Royal United Service Institution.

But the Admiral did not need to be told that a friend was gone.

"Is that poor Scott?" he said.

As firing became general the wind died away to a mere breath; but the *Victory* was carried along by her impetus and the swell.

How long she continued on the same course after the enemy had opened fire cannot be stated with exactitude; perhaps fifteen minutes, perhaps more, perhaps less. But Nelson, about twenty-five minutes past twelve, gave orders to port the helm. He had not yet finished his tactical manœuvres. He had one more surprise for the enemy, one more trump card to throw down. He had been steering well to the north of east, threatening the enemy's van. But the entire movement was a feint. He did not intend to engage the van at all. He now curved about on an entirely new course.

The enemy were no better able than before to gauge the depth of his cunning. Some flattered themselves their line was so closely knit that he despaired of breaking through the van and was looking elsewhere for a gap. But Nelson's business was with the Franco-Spanish centre. And though he had concealed his purpose with masterly completeness, that had been his objective all along. After keeping the hostile van in a fever of suspense, he left them out of the battle altogether. That was one of his motives. By leaving them out of the battle altogether, he gained a local superiority, and matched his twenty-seven ships with twenty-three of the foe. He had other motives. By attacking the enemy's centre he joined hands with Collingwood, seconding his endeavours and receiving his support. And last, but not least, he struck his blow home where he hoped and expected to find Villeneuve himself.

Oddly enough, although less than half a mile separated him from the enemy's line, there was absolutely nothing to show which was Villeneuve's ship. Every glass on the *Victory's* quarter-deck was busily employed, but in answer to Nelson's repeated questions there was no information forthcoming. It was clear, however, that the French and Spanish had mixed their ships, not kept them separate. The Spaniards were distinguished not only by their ensigns but by enormous wooden crosses that swung from the end of each spanker boom. Prominent among them, and easily identified by her four decks, was Nelson's old enemy of St. Vincent days, the *Santissima Trinidad*. She at least was bound to be a flagship. Astern of her there was a slight interval, and then came two French ships, the first large and the second something smaller. Towards the interval between the *Trinidad* and the two Frenchmen Nelson gave orders for the *Victory* to steer. The smaller French ship was the *Redoutable*, and the larger was Villeneuve's own *Bucentaure*, which Nelson by instinct was singling out in spite of her efforts to conceal herself. The *Trinidad*, the *Bucentaure*, and the *Redoutable* continued to pour in broadsides which the *Victory* sustained as she could. To have hauled her wind on the larboard tack would have brought her relief at once. But there was still much to be done before she could hope to engage on equal terms.

In spite of the enemy's heavy raking fire, Nelson and Hardy continued to walk the quarter-deck, engaged in earnest conversation. The position was one of considerable danger. For the Frenchmen, as usual, were firing at masts and rigging; and when their aim was too low, their shot swept the *Victory's* upper deck from bowsprit to taffrail. Five hundred yards from the larboard beam of the *Bucentaure* a

well-aimed broadside from that vessel brought down the *Victory's* mizzen topmast. This almost checked her career. A moment later a shot smashed the wheel to pieces. Without loss of a moment the tiller was manned and the ship steered from the gun-room, Lieutenant Quilliam and Mr. Atkinson, the master, taking turns to direct operations. Two minutes afterwards a bar-shot killed eight marines on the poop and wounded others. At this Nelson ordered Captain Adair to take his men from the poop and distribute them about the ship. As he did so, a round-shot, that had come through four hammocks in the nettings on the larboard bow, and had carried away part of the larboard quarter of the Admiral's barge upon the booms, struck the fore brace bitts on the quarter-deck and passed between Nelson and Hardy. A splinter from the bitts brushed Hardy's left foot and tore the buckle from his shoe. Both instantly stopped and surveyed each other with inquiring looks, each supposing the other to be wounded. Then Nelson smiled and said to Hardy, "This is too warm work to last long."

The truth is—for Nelson did not state it in full—that the *Victory* was undergoing an ordeal for which it would be vain to seek a comparison. Never had vessel endured what she was enduring—the long-drawn agony of silent torture. It was one thing to fight in the thick of foes, selling your life dearly, lashing out with all your batteries. But the *Victory* until now had been an almost stationary target, drawing the fire of all who could train their guns on her. Hersails were torn and tattered. Her studding-sails had all of them disappeared as if some giant had shorn them with a pair of scissors. The enemy were trying until the very last moment to stop her altogether. They wasted not a thought on the men within her. And the gunners below were happy



enough; busy, too, since the turn to starboard enabled them to work their guns. But on the fore-castle and on the quarter-deck, in the waist and on the poop, no less than fifty men had fallen: not in the heat of action, not with the flush of anger upon them; but by accident, by mischance, because the *Bucentaure*, or one of her consorts, had tried for a stay or a shroud and aimed too low for the mark. Those who remained alive were sorely tried. Yet they rose heroically to the situation. Nelson declared that he had never asked seamen to endure so much, or seen them endure with such unflinching courage.

At last! At last they reached the enemy's line. To Hardy it appeared a close-knit chain, an impenetrable wall. With disappointment for once in his cheery voice he informed Nelson that they could proceed no farther without collision. But Nelson replied sharply, almost testily, "I can't help it. Doesn't signify which we run aboard of. Go on board which you please. Take your choice." He spoke rapidly. Yet the words were hardly out of his mouth when the *Victory*, responsive to his voice, shouldered a way for herself between the *Redoutable* and the *Bucentaure*. The *Redoutable* was to starboard, and the *Bucentaure* to larboard. So close was Villeneuve's ship that the main yardarm of the *Victory* brushed the vangs of her gaff, and had there been wind enough to spread the *Bucentaure's* ensign, the *Victory's* men could have clutched it and torn it from the mizzen peak.

It was a quarter to one. The moment had come that was to decide the fate of nations. The sixty-eight-pounder carronade on the larboard side of the *Victory's* fore-castle had the honour of beginning. She was loaded with a single round-shot and a keg of five hundred musket bullets, and these she delivered with unerring accuracy through the stern

windows of the *Bucentaure*, where there was nothing to stop them, where there was nothing to shield the hundreds of men that crowded the long fighting-decks. The carronade began it, and the big guns took up the refrain. There were fifty of them on the *Victory's* larboard side, and they were manned by those who until now had been unmolested by the enemy's fire; lusty fellows, and stout and strong, the pick of England's gunners, the pick of England's fleet, gunners who at all times were true of aim, and who had received the Admiral's special injunctions to be steady and not waste a shot. The fifty guns of the *Victory's* side were double-shotted or treble-shotted, and as the *Victory* passed slowly under the *Bucentaure's* stern, they poured their charges one by one into the Frenchman's vitals. The British crew were nearly choked by the clouds of black smoke that entered the port-holes; and Nelson and Hardy were covered with dust from the crumbling ruins of the rich giltwork that had adorned the *Bucentaure's* stern.

This was the crowning moment of Trafalgar! This was the moment for which the *Victory* had been born! This was the moment for which she had lived! It was not so much that in a minute or two of time she had slain or wounded four hundred men and dismounted twenty guns, though this was a pitch of destructiveness without precedent, without example.<sup>1</sup> It was not so much that she had broken the enemy's back, though that by itself might have conquered them: it was something more and something greater. The *Victory* had monopolized Villeneuve's attention until it was too late. For an

<sup>1</sup> Aboard the *Bucentaure* the dead accumulated so fast that there was no time to deal with them. They were therefore flung amidships: and as the ship was subjected to further fire, the heaps were mangled horribly.

hour she had drawn upon herself the eyes of twenty-one ships,<sup>1</sup> the allied centre and van. They had waited for Villeneuve's commands, and received none. They had looked for Villeneuve's signal flags, and he had hoisted none. He too had been watching the *Victory*, watching and waiting (though delay was dangerous) for the *Victory* to reveal her design. And the *Victory* had revealed no design; and he had striven with all his strength to hold her off and push her back. And failed in that too. He had seen nothing else. He had not looked at his own left wing, which Collingwood had been shattering for nearly an hour past. He had not looked at his own right wing, which was standing by inactive. His eyes were riveted on the *Victory*, until the *Victory* ran under his very stern and blotted him out of existence; or, still worse, reduced his vessel to a hulk and left him in the wreckage, powerless now to say a thing to his fleet, powerless to rectify any mistake—the least or the most egregious.

When the *Victory* burst through the enemy's line, the Battle of Trafalgar was won. It remained to convert a signal conquest into the completest ever gained at sea.

## V

It has been said that when Villeneuve in the early morning turned his fleet on the northerly tack, he sacrificed some of the symmetry for which his line was justly famed. Here and there his ships were

<sup>1</sup> Theoretically twenty-one; actually seventeen. Collingwood, obedient to instructions, cut off the last twelve of the enemy's ships, but himself engaged the thirteenth, counting from the rear. Moreover, three of the allies, who were out of position, were hidden from his view by the twelve he cut off; so that, instead of matching himself with twelve opponents he virtually tackled sixteen. Cp. *Trafalgar Report*, p. xiii.

thrown out of place and failed to get back again. Here and there a vessel, so displaced, proceeded alongside of the other ships on a parallel course to leeward. The *Neptune*, of eighty guns, was one of these. She was so placed that she exactly commanded the gap through which the *Victory* elbowed her way; and as the *Victory* elbowed her way, the *Neptune* opened a raking fire on her from a position which nothing could possibly have bettered. The *Victory's* flying jib-boom and her spritsail yard and her sprit topsail yard were shot away. Her starboard cathead, in spite of its strength, was shattered to splinters. Her best bower and her sheet anchor were disabled. Her spare anchor was greatly injured. Several shots penetrated her bows between wind and water. And her fore mast and bowsprit were gravely wounded. Such was the result of a short cannonade—short, for the *Neptune* would not keep her place. She feared that Nelson intended to run aboard her, and setting her jib in a great hurry, she pushed on out of reach.

Grievous though the harm may have been that she inflicted on the *Victory*, she might have done more for Napoleon if she had kept her original position astern of the *Bucentaure*. When she failed to do so, the duty of filling the breach devolved on her own next astern, the *Redoutable*. The *Redoutable* was not an eighty-gun ship. She was a ship of ordinary size—what in England would have been called a third-rate. But Lucas, her captain, was no ordinary man. He was a man of ideas and a man of unquenchable courage. The dream of his life was to capture a British ship. He felt certain that it could be done for which you may honour him or not as you like; and he felt equally certain that it could not be done by gunnery, which shows him to have been a man of sense. Boarding was the

method he proposed to himself. By boarding he would capture a British ship and win the approval of Napoleon. In this direction all his thoughts had been turned for weeks past. He had given every man in his ship a canvas case holding two grenades. To every man's belt he had attached a tin tube of his own design for holding quick-match. His ship's company were constantly engaged hurling dummy grenades of cardboard—also his own invention. Those who excelled were encouraged, and some grenadiers became so expert that they could at the same moment throw accurately a bomb with each hand. Similar pains were taken with musketry, and no less than a hundred men won Lucas's favour for unerring marksmanship. A picked band practised special exercises for grappling-irons; and those who showed no particular aptitude were subjected every day most vigorously to cutlass practice and pistol drill.

The *Redoutable*, it will be easily understood, was not exactly the ideal ship to second the *Bucentaure's* effort to save the allied line from being broken. Her eagerness, indeed, was a thing to be witnessed. She all but rested her bowsprit on the *Bucentaure's* taffrail; and more than once the *Bucentaure* shouted, "Hulloa! You will run me down!" But the *Victory* was not to be stopped by close packing. Concentration of artillery was the only effectual defence; and in artillery the *Redoutable* was weak, or weak compared with the *Neptune*. But when hope was gone and the line beyond remedy broken, then the *Redoutable* found herself. As Lucas had gone the rounds of the ship several had reminded him: "*Commandant, n'oubliez-pas l'abordage!*" And now that the *Victory* filled their horizon, the men were enthusiastic. Their captain had promised them an English ship. Was it really to be Nelson's, the

British flagship? They had not hoped to fly at such high game. The decks re-echoed with excited cries—"Vive l'Empereur! Vive le Commandant!"

When the *Victory's* attention had been distracted from the *Bucentaure* by the *Neptune*,<sup>1</sup> and when the *Neptune* in turn had wriggled from her clutches, she was ready to welcome any antagonist. The *Redoutable* awaiting her to starboard, she put her helm hard a port; and about ten or twelve minutes past one the two ships collided. The *Victory* fell away at the rebound. But her starboard fore topmast stunsail boom-iron hooked itself into the larboard leech of the *Redoutable's* fore topsail; and the two ships paid off before the wind. Their advance was more or less easterly, and left the *Bucentaure* and *Trinidad* to northward and astern.

At the moment of impact Mr. Willmot, the *Victory's* bos'n, discharged the starboard sixty-eight-pounder carronade on the forecastle, loaded, as the larboard had been, with one round-shot and five hundred musket balls. This wrought havoc on the *Redoutable's* upper deck, and literally cleared her gangways. The thirty-two-pounders on the *Victory's* lower deck, the twenty-four-pounders on her middle deck, and the twelve-pounders on her main deck joined eagerly in the fray, and joyful music they made to the seaman's ear. If the *Redoutable's* men had been simple gunners, and been massed on the lower deck, their ship must soon have surrendered. But they were not simple gunners, and were not massed on the lower deck. In fact, their lower-deck ports were tightly shut, and had been since before the collision. This unusual procedure deceived their opponents, who thought the *Redout-*

<sup>1</sup> The assistance afforded by the *Neptune's* heavy fire did not deliver Villeneuve. He was captured by one of the eleven ships that followed in Nelson's wake.

able about to surrender before she had really been hurt. But the *Redoubtable* lowered her gun-deck ports to conceal the absence of men. Their absence might have tempted the *Victory* to board, before she was boarded herself: and then all their labour and pains had been lost. As a preliminary to boarding, the principal need was to clear the *Victory's* upper deck, and to this one end the *Redoubtable* for the present devoted herself. The two-handed grenadiers set briskly about their business, and succeeded in delivering two hundred bombs. The musketeers clambered into the tops or lined the main-deck gun-ports. Some enterprising officers hauled a coehorn mortar into the foretop, and with this they pumped langridge on the *Victory's* forecastle with terrible effect. The actual boarders, with pistols, axes, and swords, took what cover they could till the moment came. And that moment, they thought, could not long be delayed. For about the *Victory* the deluge of projectiles fell almost as thickly as hailstones.

At the *Victory's* last refit Nelson had had the large skylight above his cabin removed and the cavity boarded over, so as to afford him more room amidships. Here, in the centre of the quarter-deck and clear of the ropes and guns, he had a walk twenty-one feet long from the stanchion of the wheel to the coamings of the after-hatchway. And here, amid the *Redoubtable's* fusillade, he paced backwards and forwards with Hardy. The *Redoubtable* was a smaller ship than the *Victory*, and her mizzen mast rose midway between the *Victory's* mizzen and main. And Lucas's chosen musketeers in the *Redoubtable's* mizzen top had the *Victory's* quarter-deck forty-five feet distant and immediately beneath them. They were grouped together in a crouching position, and rose breast high to fire. <sup>1</sup>

At about thirty-five minutes past one<sup>1</sup> Nelson and Hardy had turned again at the wheel, and were advancing towards the hatchway. Nelson was on the left and Hardy on the right, Hardy's immense bulk screening the Admiral from the enemy's musketeers. They were so near to the companion that they had only one step more to take, when Nelson suddenly turned. Hardy took the last step, and, facing about, saw Nelson down. The Admiral was on his knees, his left hand touching the deck. The next moment his arm relaxed and he fell on his left side.<sup>2</sup>

The captain bent lovingly over his friend and expressed a hope that the wound was slight. Nelson replied: "They have done for me at last, Hardy." "I hope not," said the captain. "Yes," said Nelson, "my backbone is shot through." Hardy beckoned to Secker, the sergeant of marines, and he came at once with two seamen. These three bore Nelson

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Nicolas, vol. vii., p. 253, note, with the *Victory's* corrected time, *Trafalgar Report*, p. xiii, note 2.

<sup>2</sup> The bullet must have come from the *Redoutable's* mizzen top, because the main top was screened by the *Victory's* clewed up mainsail. It is conceivable that the sharp-shooter took deliberate aim, for Nelson's orders made him conspicuous. French tradition favours this view.

Le Provençal dit au Breton,  
"As-tu chargé ton mousqueton?  
Passe le moi. Je vois Nelson."

But the weight of evidence is against the theory. The *Redoutable's* mizzen top and main top were subsequently emptied by Midshipman Pollard. The first to be wounded on board the *Victory*, at the end of the action he was the only officer left alive on the poop. Receiving a succession of loaded muskets, he picked off man after man, the last as he attempted to descend the rigging. After the battle he was conducted into the presence of Hardy and publicly thanked for what he had done. His own idea was that the bullet was fired from the enemy's mizzen top; but he emptied the main as well, in order to make vengeance absolutely certain.



tenderly in their arms from deck to deck down to the cockpit. As they did so, Nelson drew his handkerchief from his pocket and covered his face and the stars on his breast, lest the seamen should see who passed them. When the cockpit was reached, there were so many there already that the bearers had difficulty in threading their way. Dr. Beatty instructed them to go far forward on the port side. And there the Admiral was placed on a bed, which was propped against a knee of the ship. His clothes were removed, and he was covered with a sheet. Dr. Scott, the chaplain, supported him on one side, and Mr. Burke, the purser, on the other. The surgeon made an examination as gently as he could, and asked the Admiral to describe his sensations. Himself he knew from the very first, though he concealed his knowledge, that Nelson's instinct had told him the truth, and that the wound unhappily was mortal.

Up above, the guns still rumbled and lumbered, tumbled and thundered. The twelve-pounders were not so active as they had been, and for a good reason. On the main deck of the *Redoubtable* the guns were specially elevated, in order the better to co-operate with the muskets and grenades and fighting-tops. And so before Nelson had been three minutes gone there were on the *Victory's* main deck no less than forty casualties. A carronade well aft might have saved the situation; but the wisecrates of the dockyard had removed all guns from the *Victory's* poop. A carronade well forward might have turned the *Redoubtable's* flank. But the starboard gun on the forecastle, which at the outset had done such yeoman service, by a singular mischance had been put out of action immediately afterwards.

To those who fought on the *Victory's* main deck, and to the few who remained alive on the *Victory's*

upper deck, it must have been strange to hear the lusty cheers and loud huzzas from below them. For the twenty-four-pounders on the middle deck and the thirty-two-pounders on the lower deck were eating away the Frenchman's hull like an army of mice at a cheese. The gunners, strong-sinewed and loving their work, had only two grounds for anxiety. They feared lest they should fire right through the *Redoutable* and injure some British ship on her other side. To obviate this, they depressed their guns, loaded with three shots apiece, and fired with diminished charge. And since their muzzles touched the *Redoutable's* timbers when the carriages were run out, they feared lest the Frenchman should be destroyed by conflagration. So a fireman was stationed by every gun, and as soon as ever a piece was discharged he dashed a pail of water through the gun-port into the hole which the round-shot had made.

There was a moment, indeed, in the strife when the *Victory's* gunners ceased firing. The *Redoutable's* surrender seemed so certainly imminent that their cannonade, to these simple souls, was like hitting a fallen man. They paused for some seconds, and as they did so, Lucas felt that his time had come. The *Victory's* upper deck was almost empty, for the few effectives were busily employed carrying the last of the wounded below. Captain Hardy, Captain Adair of the marines, and one or two officers—these were all that were left. So Lucas gave the word, and his boarders assembled in the shrouds, and in the chains, and along the gangways, cutlasses dangling from their wrists, tomahawks in their hands, and pistols in their belts.

Certainly a crisis had come; and, if boarding had been as easy as walking, the French would soon have been over the side. But the *Victory's* bulwarks sloped

inwards; for protective purposes her top sides "tumbled home." And the *Redoubtable's* works did the same. The combatant ships were securely lashed together. Lucas's grappling party had seen about that. But a wooden trench divided them, a gulf of fourteen feet or more, a yawning deep ravine. Lucas instantly gave orders to cut the supports of the main yard and let that mighty limb serve as a bridge. It was done. But time was lost. There was a few minutes delay; and in those few minutes Hardy had taken the necessary action. He had called his first reserves from below and distributed small-arms.

The most savage of contests, however, took place. For the Frenchmen were ready to do and dare. They were to capture Nelson's flagship, were they not? Had they emptied her decks to be thwarted now? Were they to stop just short of the summit of their hopes? Were they to be denied their ingress by a handful? With cutlass and pistol and sword they fought, while the grenadiers continued to scatter their bombs and the main-deck guns their splinters. The gallant Captain Adair of the marines was killed. He was standing on the gangway encouraging his men when a musket bullet hit him in the neck. Lieutenant Ram took his place, and received such ghastly injuries that, though they bound his wounds in the cockpit, he tore off his bandages and bled to death. Another lieutenant threw himself into the fray, and was wounded and carried below. Eighteen men were killed and twenty injured, and still the French came on. But they met a courage as stout as their own. Still on the *Victory's* quarter-deck stood Hardy, tall as a Norse god, and in this hurricane of death untouched, as if all tangible things had promised not to hurt him. Trumpet in hand, he directed the fight. Slowly but surely he drove the Frenchmen back.

Ensign Yon of the *Redoutable* and four of his seamen by an anchor-stock reached the *Victory's* deck. By themselves they were helpless, these gallant five. And no reinforcements reached them.

And now, after daring all and enduring all, and after daring and enduring alone, the *Victory* received assistance.

The *Temeraire*, the "Fighting" *Temeraire*, had followed the *Victory* closely into action. At first the *Victory* had screened her almost completely. But as they drew nearer to the allied line the *Temeraire* in her turn drew the converging fire of many raking broadsides. Her pace would have enabled her to draw up level with the *Victory*. But lest the enemy should thereby gain a hint as to the meaning of his plans, Nelson would not suffer her to do so; and obedient to an order to keep in his wake, the *Temeraire* cut away her studding-sails. After the *Victory's* turn to starboard, there was no longer the same reason for keeping astern, and, just before the *Victory* broke the enemy's line, "a slight deployment took place. . . . The *Victory*, *Temeraire*, and *Neptune* were almost abreast of each other, the *Victory* being somewhat ahead of the other two, with the *Temeraire* to starboard."<sup>1</sup> When the *Victory* ran under the *Bucentaure's* stern, the *Temeraire* was obliged to put her helm sharply over, in order to avoid a collision. For a while her course must have been directly south, parallel and opposite to the *Redoutable*. The *Redoutable* in passing brought down her mizzen topmast. But the *Temeraire*, nothing daunted, turned east again as soon as she could, and at last broke the enemy's line on her own account. But further misfortunes awaited her. The *Neptune*, since her assault upon the *Victory*, had wore and come to on the same tack. In other words she had described a circle. She was

<sup>1</sup> *Trafalgar Report*, p. xiv.

again in an admirable position for raking, and her guns were ready loaded. She loosed her bolts with terrible precision. Down came the *Temeraire's* fore yard, and down came her main topmast. She had already lost her mizzen topmast. Her fore mast was sprung and her bowsprit wounded. She was now little more than a helpless cripple, a motionless paralytic.

For a while she lay upon the water with her wings broken, eating her heart out with vexation and with envy of happier ships. She had had no chance of showing her mettle or proving her quality. Her guns were still cold, her batteries inactive. She knew not what to do. But suddenly two ships bore down on her—two ships locked in one another's embrace. One carried the white flag of England at the fore; the other—strangest sight yet seen—had her lower-deck gun-ports shut. These two were conscious apparently of nothing but the duel that they fought. Nearer and nearer they came. And the *Temeraire* looked to the priming of her guns. Nearer, and the *Temeraire's* gunners could hardly contain themselves. The French ship happily was nearest them, her blind side opposed to their eager sight. Another moment, and she was on them. Her bowsprit passed over their larboard gangway a little before the main rigging. It was the work of a moment to lash it fast, and the *Temeraire*, having tucked her adversary's head securely under her arm, discharged every weapon she had on board with the noise of an avalanche splitting the rocks and devastating the forests.

The *Redoubtable's* battle was over for ever. Two hundred men fell upon her decks.

The coming of the *Temeraire* to the help of the *Victory* is a classic example of combination. Nothing could have been timelier. Nothing could possibly

have been more opportune. But some have magnified the extent of the *Temeraire's* assistance, implying that the *Victory* was at her last gasp—that she was lost unless help could reach her. This is a mistake. The *Redoutable's* attack was formidable indeed. But the *Victory*, in spite of all that she had suffered, was still quite capable of looking after herself. The reserves that Hardy called from below came from the middle deck. On the lower deck there were more than two hundred men; and of these not a single man had been killed, and only two had been wounded. At the time when the *Temeraire* came up, Hardy was, it must be admitted, still very preoccupied. For the *Redoutable* with her grenades had set fire to herself, and he was busily fighting the flames—fighting the flames which leapt aboard in a manner no Frenchman could imitate.<sup>1</sup>

Bucket after bucket of water was heaved across the trench that separated the *Redoutable* from the *Victory*. And for a time the fire was got under. But when it broke out afresh, Hardy instructed two midshipmen, Ogilvie and Collingwood, together with a sergeant-major of marines and eight or ten hands, to board the enemy. Denied the usual channels of communication, they embarked from the *Victory's* stern ports in one of the boats that were towing there, and entered by the stern ports of the *Redoutable*.

<sup>1</sup> The coming of the *Temeraire* to the *Victory's* assistance may be compared in one particular with the appearance of Blücher at Waterloo. It transferred to the *Temeraire* a certain sum of credit from the *Victory's* capital account. This is well shown by the story of the blue-jacket at Nelson's funeral. During the sermon the word "victory" recurred more than once. "The victory is to be ascribed to Thee alone!" "Glory be to Him who gave the victory," etc., etc. At last the auditor in question could no longer repress his indignation. He nudged his neighbour with his elbow, and in a loud whisper remarked, "*Victory! Victory!* Why don't 'e say a word about the *Temeraire*, my ship, d'ye see?"

As they did so, their boat was knocked to pieces by the random shot of a distant ship.

Of the *Redoubtable's* 643 men, 522 were dead and wounded. The appalling effect of the *Victory's* heavy ordnance was evidenced by the overturning of almost all the lower-deck guns, and by the perilous number of shot-holes between wind and water.<sup>1</sup> The ship was on fire and the captain wounded. Therefore Hardy's embassy was well received. But the *Redoubtable's* limbs were failing her now. The handcuffs which she had tried to fasten on her opponents broke away. The grip of the two antagonists relaxed. And just as the *Victory* wrenched herself free from all trammels, the gallant Frenchman's main and mizzen masts went over the side together. The main mast fell upon the *Temeraire's* poop, smashing the poop rail to fragments, and along this bridge so conveniently placed the *Temeraire's* men with a shout of triumph plunged forward to take possession.

About an hour had passed since Nelson had left the deck, and repeated messages had come from the cockpit asking that Hardy would come to him. He greatly desired to see Hardy. No one but Hardy would do. It was not only that he wished to confide his last wishes into Hardy's ear, for no one had Hardy's sympathy. It was not only that he wished to exact from Hardy a promise not to throw his body overboard, but there was something else. There was a question that he was living to have answered. "How goes the battle? How goes the day with us?" And no one but Hardy could answer it. No one had Hardy's knowledge and experience. No one on board like Hardy could throw a practised eye over the whole battlefield and estimate the result.

Hardy twice found release from his cares on deck

<sup>1</sup> It was owing, of course, to these that the *Redoubtable* eventually foundered.

and hurried below. His first visit was at a quarter to three, and his second at a quarter to four. On the first occasion he pledged himself that twelve of the enemy had been taken; on the second he had better news. He would not exaggerate: he would not multiply numbers even to soothe the death-bed of his friend. But with his own eyes and through his own glass he had counted fifteen prizes. He bade his last farewell to the Admiral about four o'clock, or five minutes afterwards. But Nelson would not die. He was not satisfied with fifteen prizes. The number was insufficient. It was not even half the enemy's fleet. Just before half-past four the battle ended. Villeneuve was taken. And round about the *Victory* were the twenty prizes that Nelson had bargained for. They hurried below and knelt beside him, and whispered the news in his ear. The Admiral opened his eyes and smiled; and smiling, closed them again.

On board the other ships of the fleet, as soon as the spoils were counted and the full extent of the conquest known, a festive jollity prevailed. All who were wounded felt certain now that they would recover and live to see their friends; and all who were unwounded rejoiced, and their joy was full. The midshipmen, of course, were the soul of things, and, under the magic of their spirits, the candles in the blacking-bottles gave the radiance of candelabra, the marsala sparkled like champagne, and even the French and Spanish officers, guests of the berth, forgot their woes and joined in the merriment. But about 7.30 (according to the logs), a whisper went round, a chilly rumour that set a seal upon men's lips. One asked his neighbour to repeat the news in case he had not heard it aright. But everyone was hurrying up the companion-ladder.

On the upper deck there was a lull, and a hush out



of keeping with the crowd assembled there. The captain, in his rough-weather cloak, the officers, the seamen, the marines, all gazed fixedly and silently over the side into the still cold blackness of the night. All strove to find what all had failed to find. No need here to ask for news. The news declared itself unmistakably in the motionlessness of the midshipmen, the droop of the captain's hat, and other mute expressions of sorrow and dismay.

"No admiral's lights on board the *Victory*!"

## VI

After the battle came the storm—the storm that Nelson had predicted. It tossed and tore friend and foe alike. It drove the prizes back into harbour, and sank them as they reached home. It wrecked those who had escaped and those who ventured to assist them. It buried on the battlefield all but four of Nelson's prizes, lest his countrymen should forget the victor in contemplation of his spoils. It tried and tested British seamanship as British seamanship had never before been tried. And it tried the *Victory* to the uttermost. Roaring under her lee were the shoals of Trafalgar. To keep clear of them would have taxed her resources if she had been sound in wind and limb. And she was far from being that. Her mizzen topmast, we have seen, went at an early hour. No sooner was the battle ended than the mizzen mast itself went by the board, breaking short off about two feet above the poop. The fore mast was so gravely damaged that to save it the fore topmast had to be struck. The main mast was badly wounded. So was the main yard, the bowsprit, the jib-boom, and the main topmast. All the rigging was hacked to pieces, and hands were employed without rest in fishing and knotting and splicing.

The sum of the wounded was 75, of whom 7 were officers and 68 men. And the dead numbered 57—Nelson, his secretary Scott, Captain Adair, Lieutenant Ram, two midshipmen, the captain's clerk, 32 seamen, and 18 marines. In all, on the official list, 132 casualties. But after the list was completed and sent in, 27 more wounded reported themselves; among these Mr. Willmot, the bos'n, who, receiving a painful gash in the thigh, bound it up and stuck to his quarters. The wounded, therefore, numbered 102, and of these 97 recovered.

On the night of the battle the *Victory* sounded and found thirteen fathoms, and stood to the southward under what was left of the foresail and reefed main topsail. On the 22nd the breeze freshened from the south-west, and she found serious difficulty in making an offing. Of the other vessels, those that were manageable were towing those that were not. On the 23rd the gale broke, and the *Victory*, with the little sail that she could carry, laboured deeply in the heavy seas. On the 24th she was taken in tow by the *Polyphemus*—"Polly Infamous" the seamen called her; and in the afternoon she managed to rig up some jury topmasts and a mizzen. This made her more comfortable. But on the 25th, at 5 p.m., the storm increasing, the towing-hawser parted. The main yard was carried away and the sail torn to ribbons. The ship rolled dangerously, and an anxious night was spent. On the 26th the storm abated, and the *Neptune*, taking her in tow, in forty-eight hours brought her safely to Gibraltar, where they arrived on the 28th.

Nelson's body had been placed in a leaguer filled with brandy, which was reverently placed in his fore cabin and covered with a silken Royal Standard.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A fourth part of this is preserved in the Royal Naval Museum, Greenwich.

Here it was guarded day and night by marines. At Gibraltar, under Dr Beatty's care, the brandy was withdrawn and replaced by spirits of wine. On November 3rd, after a hasty refit, the *Victory*, accompanied by the *Belleisle*, set out to carry her precious freight to England. She encountered boisterous weather and was more than a month on the way. She arrived at Spithead on December 4th, and for a week was the object of reverential attention. Her battered sides, her blood-stained decks, her jury masts, and knotted rigging spoke eloquently in a language which all could understand. On December 11th she left Spithead, arriving at Sheerness on the 22nd. Here the body of her beloved Admiral was carried on board the commissioner's yacht, and the proudest flag she had ever flown was lowered for the last time.

The rest of the *Victory's* tale may be shortly told. She was paid off on January 16, 1806, and, after undergoing a thorough repair, was recommissioned in March 1808. For the next five years she was constantly employed, and twice went out to the Peninsular War. On the first visit she helped to bring home Sir John Moore's army from Corunna. But in chief she served as flagship to Admiral Saumarez, the victor of Algeçiras, and Nelson's second at the Nile. With him she journeyed backwards and forwards to the Baltic, doing her work, as always, splendidly, but finding, of course, no laurels to compare with those she had already won. At the end of 1811 the British fleet returning from the Baltic encountered a gale the violence of which exceeded anything which even the *Victory* could remember. The *St. George* and *Defence* were lost off the coast of Denmark, and the *Hero* went down off the Texel. But the *Victory* was preserved—providentially, it may well be thought, for the admiration

of posterity. Once more she was repaired, and once more requisitioned. In 1815 she was named for a flag; and the story goes that no less than six admirals put in a claim for her. But Waterloo brought an end to the war, and with it an end to her fighting career.

With all her labours ended, with all her storms forgotten, with all her battles over and done, with memories woven into her very sails and plaited into her rigging, with the glamour cast upon her storied timbers by her association with Nelson, it is permissible to imagine what a welcome awaited her, or what a welcome would have awaited her, had she been the *Argo* returning to Iolchos—the songs that would have been sung in her praise, the goblets that would have been raised in her honour, the roses that would have been hung about her bows. But the *Victory's* home was not Greece, but England. Nothing more, the shipwrights said, could possibly be expected from her. It was, therefore, proposed to sell her for what her planks would fetch and break her up in some Thames-side yard.

This impious sacrilege was averted by John Poole, the author of *Paul Pry*. His indignant article, first published in the *Brighton Gazette*, was copied and reprinted by most other newspapers. The British public thereupon for the customary nine days whipped itself into a fine frenzy, and the *Victory* was happily and mercifully saved from the fate that overtook the *Temeraire*.

In 1825 she was made flagship to the Admiral Commanding-in-Chief at Portsmouth. At Portsmouth she has slumbered and dreamed ever since, and at Portsmouth she rests to-day.

## EPILOGUE

### TO-DAY†

The bones of the *Victory* ought to be sacred relics for Englishmen to worship almost.—THACKERAY.

THE first view of the *Victory* which the visitor to Nelson's flagship should allow himself is the view from Portsmouth Point. The walk down Broad Street will suggest the proper mood; and the Point itself—the street broken off short by the water—is so eighteenth-century in character at this hour that it is only necessary before making the journey to study Rowlandson's picture "At Portsmouth Point," and the least imaginative person will easily believe himself back in "eighteen hundred and war-time," and hurrying to go aboard some wooden wall. The *Victory* is still hidden from view even at the end of the street. But the traveller who is willing to push his way to the waterside among children playing, fishermen cleaning fish, and importunate watermen offering their services, will be rewarded with a peep of the old ship that is worth coming miles to see.

If he yields to the importunities of a waterman, he may row direct to his destination from the Point. But we will suppose him to follow the more usual route, first crossing the harbour by the steam-ferry, and afterwards chartering a boat on the other side, near which the *Victory* lies at anchor. If he will

† Written in 1913.

take this route, he should, on arrival at Gosport, take his stand for a minute or two in front of the building marked "Ratsey and Lapthorn, Sail-makers," or that marked "Camper and Nicholsons, Yacht-builders." From either place, especially with the aid of field-glasses, he will be able to make a detailed survey of the ship's exterior. She is painted black for the most part, with three broad bands of white to mark the gun decks and a broad band of red at the water-line. There are no port-lids as of old to cover the gun-ports. Where there are guns mounted, a half-port fitted with three panes of glass and scalloped to receive the barrel falls inboard from above, and a solid half-port made to fall outboard embraces the gun from below. Where there are no guns, the port has in the frankest way converted itself into a window.

At the bows of the ship the figurehead, smart with fresh paint, engages the attention. Below it, out of the hawse-holes, emerge iron cables unknown to the seamen of Nelson's day. The catheads to which the anchors were lifted are no longer decorated with cats' heads, though several old masks with terrifying squints may be found in the Dockyard Museum. In place of the cats' heads there are royal crowns.

The *Victory* floats proudly among ships of all sorts—steam yachts and racing cutters, *Dreadnoughts* and coaling vessels. The steam tugs snort from side to side. Private yachts lie idly at their moorings. A procession of black destroyers glides with effortless motion from Spithead. And beamy ships' cutters, with their shiny brass funnels, plough their way out of harbour to the ships. Away in the background is Portsmouth railway station, with an Isle of Wight boat lying alongside. Some distance to the left is the water-front of His Majesty's dock-

yard. Between the station and the dockyard is Portsmouth Hard, with the "Keppel's Head Inn" as memorial of the *Victory's* earliest master and the days when she fired all her guns for joy to hear of his acquittal. And far away to the left, beyond the harbour's innermost recesses, rise the green ramparts of the Portsdown Hills, with their white escarpments of chalk.

Amid such surroundings the *Victory* is still acknowledged queen. The Union flag of Britain flies at her jack staff. The ensign of Britain's Navy floats at the ensign staff, and at the main top-gallant mast-head flies the banner of St. George, the armorial bearings of the Admiral Commanding-in-Chief at Portsmouth, the most highly-placed officer on the active list.

When we enter a boat and row out to the ship, we realize for the first time that the masts and spars are too small. Seen from the shore they look correct enough, or rather they deceive the eye, which is always too ready to be deceived in matters of distance and perspective. The deception is heightened considerably by the present position of the hull. When the *Victory* was first completed for sea, her gun deck was three feet eleven from the water. Now three feet eleven is roughly the breadth of the white bands that ribbon the *Victory's* side. Judge then how highly she is lifted up, now that she is without the full number of her guns and gun-carriages; without her powder and projectiles; without her fuel and water; without her boats and provisions; and without the thousand men who formed her complement. She stands from the surface like an empty cask instead of sitting upon it like a duck. When Turner was engaged on his picture of the *Victory*, which hangs in the Painted Hall at Greenwich, he drew her towering out of the water, just as she

appears to-day; and when the mistake was pointed out to him, he tried to mend matters by raising the level of the sea—a stroke of genius that still further detracts from the accuracy of his portrait!

From the boat that takes us to the *Victory* we can correct the impression which we gained ashore. As we approach the ship and look upwards, we see her sides foreshortened. They gain of course in massiveness, and this quality is in no way diminished as we cease to look round and compare the *Victory* with her twentieth-century neighbours. Nelson's flagship when we lie alongside is truly stalwart enough. We can imagine her shouldering her way into the thick of battle and scattering her enemies. But the limbs are unworthy of the body. The *Victory*, when the fastest three-decker afloat, had mightier masts, more massive yards, and incomparably stouter rigging. In Nelson's day, for example, the lower main mast was set up with twelve shrouds on a side. To-day there are no more than four. It will be noted, too, that the older preference for black is disregarded. Not only the masts but the yards are painted yellow.

As we row under the *Victory's* stern we are fain to admit that the effect is rather fine. Immediately over the old rudder is the name of the ship engraven in gold. Above the name are three rows of windows, each row having seven sashes with nine panes apiece and blind windows, one at either side, to screen the ends of the quarter galleries. At either side also of the lowest row is a great star enclosed in a lozenge. Rising from the heads of the lozenges are simple uprights or pillars which support the entablature of the taffrail. This is embellished with floriated scroll-work and the Prince of Wales's feathers carved in high relief. The colour scheme here does not differ very much from that employed in other parts of the ship; but the black and yellow



are agreeably diversified by touches of red about the windows.

This is all very different from what it was in Nelson's day. In 1811, the very year in which the *Victory* (after a narrow escape from shipwreck) was once more tugged into the dockyard for repairs, a decree went forth from the Admiralty that ships of the line should have their bow and stern so shaped and so constructed as to be able to accommodate a portion of their armament pointing end-on, fore and aft. The idea originated with a great naval architect, Sir Robert Seppings, who argued with unanswerable force that a ship, when subjected to a raking fire, should at least be able to defend herself.

The change in the shape of the bow was generally acclaimed. Its effect in the case of the *Victory* has been described on an earlier page. But the alteration to the stern was open to objections. The seamen were quick to point out that British ships were not in the habit of running away and required no stern-chasers till they learned to do so. And the constructors themselves were rather doubtful what shape the new stern should take. Should it be round, or square, or elliptical? The new law, even at the moment of its promulgation, was not stringently enforced, and the *Victory's* stern embodies a compromise. There are no tiers of guns to prevent enfilade, but the old stern galleries have been cut away as if to make room for them.<sup>1</sup>

Needless to say, when the pruning was done, the *Victory* lost a sad proportion of her beauty. But we can see her still as she used to be, in Pocock's picture, "Some of Nelson's Flagships." Here the decoration of the stern is seen to be at once rich, lavish, tasteful, and appropriate. The name *Victory* is written in

<sup>1</sup> The existing rows of yellow pilasters show where the galleries used to be.

letters from three to four feet high. Graceful human figures lend interest to the pediment, and the general flatness of the architectural scheme, which to-day is so noticeable a feature, is broken by the arching curve of the galleries that span the stern from side to side.

There is no difficulty in going on board the *Victory*. There is a platform at the sea-level for the boat to come alongside, and from this a broad flight of steps leads up to the "entry port." This is the front-door of the ship. It has a neat little Georgian porch. It is situated immediately beneath the starboard main chains, and leads into the middle deck. But we pause here only to write our names in the Visitors' Book, and ascend the companion-ladder.

There were in olden times three "staircases" on every deck—the main hatchway, the fore hatchway, and the after hatchway. All of these still exist in the *Victory*, but not all are used. They are not required by the present little garrison. We ascend by the after hatchway from the middle deck to the main, from the main deck we ascend to the upper, and at the end of our climb find ourselves standing on the quarter-deck.

Immediately in front of us is the spot where Nelson received his death-wound. It is marked by a brass plate on a little plinth with the legend, "Here Nelson fell." The planking of this part of the upper deck is original. The oak beneath our feet was actually stained with the blood of Nelson and his brave fellows at Trafalgar. Standing with our back to the hatchway, we see the after part of this deck as it looked when cleared for battle. The wooden partitions that gave privacy to Hardy's state room are gone, and over against us are his cabin windows. The principal object of interest here is the state barge which was specially prepared in 1805 to convey

Nelson's body from the lying-in-state at Greenwich to Whitehall Stairs for the funeral.

As we stand by the barge, the deck immediately above us is the poop. It is approached by ladders on either side of the quarter-deck, but is not open to the inspection of visitors. It offers a fine prospect of the harbour, and affords new glimpses of the ship to those who desire to inspect it from all points. But the unsightly funnels, the lockers, the semaphore, the deckhouse, the lanterns and buckets, and other evidences of careful housewifery, do not help us to body forth the figure of Jervis leaning against the poop rail amid the blood and thunder of St. Vincent, or the figure of Nelson as he came to visit Pasco with instructions for his last great signal.

Under the break of the poop is the steering-wheel. It is not the wheel that guided Nelson into battle—that was smashed beyond repair—but it serves to mark the position of the old wheel, which it resembles in some particulars. It is at present embellished with the words of Nelson's signal, and serves as a pendant to the trophy above it—a panel shaped like a fighting-top and painted with guns and ensigns; a large royal crown in high relief, and Nelson's motto emblazoned on a scroll: all very appropriate and edifying, but tending to distract attention from what is really authentic and from the genuine antiquity of our surroundings.

When we turn with our backs to the poop, we have in front of us that aspect of the ship's interior which has changed more than any since the classic days. The quarter-deck has no longer any boundary, no longer any definition. Instead of breaking off short, instead of being divided from the forecastle by the yawning gulf of the waist, it is carried forward in one continuous sweep. The *Victory* is flush-decked. On either side, too, are high walls or bulwarks that

Nelson never knew, and these are continued alongside of the quarter-deck proper, where of old there were embrasures for guns. But—worse than all—between the fore and the main mast rises a low pitched roof glazed with large panes of glass and a black, unsightly chimney. We are reconciled to going below.

The main deck, to which we descend, should prove most deeply interesting, for here in the stern are Nelson's apartments. But, alas! there is no admittance. The outer room is reserved for naval courts-martial, which are held here in preference to being held on shore. And the inner room, Nelson's *sanctum sanctorum*, is screened entirely from the vulgar gaze. The court-martial room is, to say the least, commodious. It is well lighted by the quarter-deck skylight (replaced since Trafalgar), and contains a stove, a long table with chairs, two or three forms, and a few other items of furniture. Nelson's cabin lies beyond; poor in appointments, rich in associations.

Debarred from entering these sacred precincts, we turn our steps again forward. On this deck there are no less than eighteen guns. All of them are naval guns, and all are muzzle-loaders. But they need not detain us, for they have no connection or historical association with the *Victory*, nor is there even any reason to suppose that they fought at Trafalgar. Of more interest is a hand-pump for swilling the decks with water out of the hold. It is made of a single oak-tree hollowed throughout its length.

Flanked by this object is the door of the museum, whose glass roof we noticed on the deck above. The room is hung with Nelson prints and Nelson battle-plans, chiefly engravings prepared to illustrate Clarke and M'Arthur's *Life*. In addition to

these there are Nelson MSS. and autographs, a group of old muskets, one of which was used on board at Trafalgar, and other relics. But the chief treasures of the museum are two pictures by Devis, or, to be more correct, two replicas. The oil-painting behind the curtain at the end of the room is the well-known picture of Nelson's death in the cockpit. The smaller painting near the door shows the Admiral in the clothes he was wearing in the hour of battle. Devis joined the *Victory* at Spithead on her return to England, and stayed aboard while she moved round to the Thames. The evidence he collected and the sketches he drew give his pictures an historical value far in excess of their merit as works of art.

When we leave the museum and descend the companion, we regain our starting-point—the middle deck. Here there are several articles of interest. First and foremost, ten twenty-four pounders, of which four were actually handled and fought on this deck at Trafalgar. The method in which they are mounted is quite correct, and their accessories are worthy of study. Breechings, handspikes, and gun-tackle alike are there, and, neatly hooked away in the beam above, the sponge, the worm, and the rammer. There is even a sample shot to illustrate the size of projectile thrown. It looks small in comparison with the size of the gun. Then in a large shallow locker with a glass top are the fore topsail and main topsail which the *Victory* wore in her greatest fight. It requires no imagination to see the rents which the bullets made and the gashes where the shot passed through. Hanging from the beam above is a drum on which the drummer of marines sounded the call to battle, and beside it is one of the canvas buckets which the powder-monkeys used for carrying cartridges from the magazine to the guns.

The officers' quarters in the after part of this deck are not open to the public. We therefore descend to the gun deck. The planking here is all original, as indeed is the entire fabric of the vessel from this point downwards. Well forward, the riding bitts should be noticed, round which the hempen cables passed. The floor timbers bear upon their face the unmistakable signs of age. They wake responsive to the thoughts of the old days when scores of light-hearted seamen made merry on this deck, laughing and yarning and drinking flip. And here, too, are eight of the *Victory's* heaviest guns, the noisy thirty-two pounders. All are authentic; all are original. All played their part at Trafalgar and elsewhere in seaming and furrowing the planks on which they now repose. Here truly we stand in a very oaken shrine of British bravery.

But the most sacred spot in the whole ship is situated on the orlop deck, to which we next descend. Here on the port side is the poor low berth made glorious by Nelson's death. As we gaze at it, the deck becomes crowded with the ghosts of those who once were here. We see the rough bed supported on one side by the purser, and on the other side by the chaplain. We see the anxious watchers, some with horn lanterns in their hands, standing helplessly around; and in the midst the frail little motionless figure with eyes like burning coals. Chevalier, the Admiral's steward, comes and kneels at his master's side. Big and clumsy though he is, he is as tender now as a great watchdog, with the watchdog's wistful look in his eyes. Dr. Beatty approaches and takes the Admiral's wrist. He makes a pretence of feeling the pulse, and ceases to feel it, but continues to hold the Admiral's hand. There is a movement among the little group. A great figure approaches, bending his head in this low-pitched room. It is the

captain. He too comes to the bedside and he too kneels. Then, moved by the compassionate pity of his great heart, he bends and kisses his dying friend. A look of infinite happiness passes over the Admiral's face, and a voice weakened with suffering and pain just breathes the words, "Thank God! I have done my duty."

It is with an effort that we recall our mind to the present, for there before us is the very frame against which the Admiral was propped in his last agony. From the beams above hang the very lanterns which lit his death-bed, and above and around us are the very timbers of the ship to which Nelson spoke ere he died: "*O Victory, Victory*, how you rack my poor brain!"

On our return to the daylight we are free if we please to enter the gun-room; but there is hardly enough to repay a visit. Under other conditions it would be easy to see where the tiller fitted into the rudder-head, and how when the wheel was destroyed the rudder itself could be worked by means of tackles leading to either side of the ship. But at present the room is divided by a fore and aft bulk-head which would effectually prevent any tiller from being mounted or worked at all.

We have now seen all there is to be seen, and we return to the middle deck and hail our boat. We entered the ship by the starboard side; we take our leave by the port.

There is quite an art in visiting an ancient monument—a mediæval castle, for instance, wedged in between the lesser streets of a black and busy town. The sightseer recoils from the labour involved in casting his mind back through the centuries. He cannot imagine the building he has entered alive with a life of its own. He cannot conjure up a host of men-at-arms with corslets, bills, and steel caps,

or archers with leathern jerkins. If he mounts to the topmost battlement, he cannot see the maze of little wooden shanties that serve as houses for the poor, nor can he see the gaily-clad citizens. He cannot hear the tumult and the creaking of ropes as the drawbridge is lifted and the portcullis descends. He only sees factory chimneys and dingy crowds, line upon line of red-brick cottages, and beneath his feet a mighty pile of stone.

Unlike many other antiquities, the *Victory* makes little or no demand upon the imagination. She tells her own story, and in doing so she conjures up the past. Therein lies her charm. All who visit her feel something of a thrill as they approach her massive sides, and as they move from deck to deck they are easily transported out of themselves back across the years that are gone. It is not unsafe for intending visitors to play with their fancies beforehand. The *Victory*, with the magic of her realism, exceeds the liveliest expectation.

And yet there is room for improvement. Something should be done in the way of restoration, something in the way of rearrangement, and a more generous proportion of the interior should be thrown open to the inspection of the public. As to restoration, a proper discretion, of course, would have to be shown. But there is no reason why any mistake should be made. The working plans, showing what the *Victory* was like in Nelson's day, are extant. It would be as easy to reconstruct the stern of the ship as to crown it with the three great lanterns which the Admiralty wisely added as recently as 1911. It would be as easy to retrace all the beauty of the bow as to revive such a detail as the spritsail yard which has but lately been set in position. The vessel should be properly rigged and becomingly sparred; and her port-lids should be restored.

Thus a beginning might be made. Then the



museum should be razed and destroyed, so that the upper deck might recapture the look which it wore when Nelson walked it. The contents of the museum should be variously distributed. The arms and weapons should be conveyed to the gun-room and properly mounted and displayed. The gun-room should become the armoury as of old, with a characteristic collection of Nelsonian small-arms. The portrait of Nelson, together with all personal relics, should be treasured in the admiral's cabin. The officers' quarters might be converted into a Trafalgar room, and house all mementoes of that greatest chapter in the *Victory's* annals. A wall of bulkheads screening Hardy's cabin would not only revive the familiar aspect of the quarter-deck, but give an additional room for exhibition purposes. Here might be gathered together all the souvenirs and relics illustrative of the vessel's own identity—the lower portion of the original main mast, removed from Windsor to Whitehall in 1901; the part of the mizzen topmast which was early cut in two by a shot from the *Bucentaure*; the shot that killed the eight marines, at present in the United Service Museum; part of the original jib-boom, in the same place; and other trophies of a similar description. Devis's masterpiece should undoubtedly be hung in the cockpit. In these days of electric lighting it ought to be possible to illuminate the picture and the orlop itself without danger to the vessel's fabric. Nothing would be simpler than to hide the burners in the lanterns that of old held "purser's glims." The guns should all be properly mounted, and one at least should be "housed"—that is to say, triced up to the ring-bolts over the ports. The paint of the interior should certainly be changed, even at the risk of obscurity. Not white but red is the proper tone for the deck where guns were fired.

Changes for the better are almost impossible under

existing conditions. The *Victory* has a double life to live, a double part to play. As flagship of the Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth she has burdens to bear, duties to perform, and work to do. And as the most interesting vessel in the world, with the Gogstad ship at Christiania her only rival, she has homage and veneration to receive and a liberal education to bestow. She is at one and the same time the oldest man-of-war upon the *Navy List* and the shrine of the modern pilgrim.

It is quite unnecessary to point out that as an ancient monument the *Victory* is unable to fulfil the whole of her duties as flagship to the Commander-in-Chief. This has long been obvious. In fact, in 1869 the honour of bearing the Commander-in-Chief's flag was taken away from her and not restored until sentiment intervened as recently as 1901. The point that has not been sufficiently insisted on is this, that, as flagship to the Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth, she is not in a position to display herself properly to those who offer homage and veneration. To take a single example: as flagship the *Victory* has to fire salutes. But her batteries are so much Latin and Greek to the modern gunner. Therefore modern guns have been introduced on her middle deck. It is better far that modern guns should be introduced than that lives should be lost by ignorance of old-time guns. But the vandalism of mounting up-to-date ordnance on a gun deck of the *Victory*!

Surely the day has come when Nelson's flagship should be released from all duties, all labours. Surely the day has come to recognize the claims that she makes upon the present generation. She wants a proper home and proper care.

Urgent as these needs are, they do not obtrude themselves. They pass unnoticed. "A proper home?"

someone will exclaim. "Is not Portsmouth Harbour good enough? What better place can there be?" The *Victory's* present berth and surroundings are picturesque. And those who visit her and are disappointed are hard to please. But what of the future? Is it not our duty to preserve the *Victory* for generations yet unborn? In her present position she is exposed to dangers of all sorts. Ten years ago she narrowly escaped being sunk at her moorings. The condemned battleship *Neptune* broke adrift whilst she was being towed out of harbour, and colliding with the *Victory*, made a large hole in her. It was only by the promptest measures that the *Victory* was carried into dock. As time goes by, she of course becomes less and less able to endure injuries of this kind. She should not be subjected a moment longer even to the possibility of their infliction.

When Drake returned from his voyage round the world in 1580, Queen Elizabeth gave orders that his ship should be preserved as a standing marvel for all ages. The *Golden Hind* was accordingly laid up at Deptford, and remained one of the sights of London until some time subsequent to the Restoration. It was then found impossible to save her any longer, and she was (in an unhappy hour) destroyed. She had been in her position rather more than eighty years. For an almost exactly similar period the *Victory* has been laid up at Portsmouth. And no one can say how long it will be before another accident happens. What would we not give for the chance of visiting the *Golden Hind* to-day? And what will succeeding generations say of us if we deny them the privilege, that we ourselves enjoy, of treading the very decks that Nelson trod?

A site should be found, and a dock should be dug, and the *Victory* drawn to a safe and comfortable

resting-place. Her underwater parts, after proper treatment, should be encased in concrete; and the entire fabric cherished, as we cherish the shrine of Edward the Confessor and the treasures of the National Gallery.

Three years ago it would have been difficult to name an authority to whom the ship could be properly entrusted. But the Society for Nautical Research, inaugurated at the end of 1910, would to-day prove an ideal guardian. During the three years that have passed since its establishment, the society, in its monthly magazine *The Mariner's Mirror*, has poured a flood of light upon the antiquities, the architecture, the equipment, the organization, and the technology of mediæval and modern ships. In this present year it has acted in a corporate capacity by the resolution of its Council to undertake the British exhibit at the Nautical Exposition at Amsterdam. A committee of the society could safely be entrusted to free the *Victory* from the accretions of the past hundred years, to preserve with the most loving and scrupulous care all that is original, authentic, and genuine, and by discreet and judicious emendations to restore the vessel in a manner conforming to the critical standard of modern archæology.

Some day, perhaps, the needful steps may be taken; some day, perhaps, the money may be raised. In the meantime the *Victory* draws men to her with the lure and fascination of a witch. Rising and falling with the throb of the tide in the home of the Navy of England, she casts her unconscious spell, breathing for ever the romance of the past, breathing her tale of valour and death; breathing also the very fragrance of beauty when the setting sun lights her yards with flame, or a rosy eve deepens the purple of her shadows and a single star hangs in the sky.













